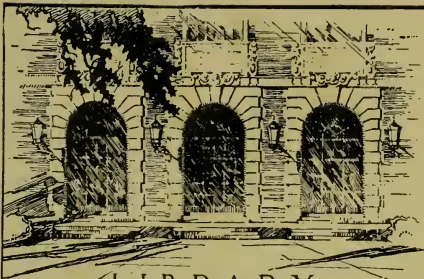




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BY

HELEN F. HETHERINGTON

AND THE

REV. DARWIN BURTON

AUTHORS OF

"PAUL NUGENT, MATERIALIST"

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

LONDON

GRIFFITH FARRAN & CO., LIMITED

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1892

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CHAPTER I.

FIGHTING SHY.

THE long anxious night was over, and a dull, grey day followed, which seemed only like mitigated darkness. Uninviting as it was to most people, Miss Witherington trudged bravely down to an early Celebration, and hearing of Mrs. Montague's illness, came on straight to The Priory to ask after her old friend. Jack saw her slight figure, in a brown dress trimmed with fur, pass the window, and immediately got up from his untasted breakfast. The door was ajar, and, listening intently, he could hear everything she said in her pleasant, fresh young voice.

He grasped the back of a chair and stood perfectly rigid, for the wish was strong upon him to go out and tell her all she wanted to know, instead of leaving her to gather what scraps of meagre information she could manage to screw out of the footman. But he told himself that he must begin as he meant to go on, and that for the future the only possible part for him to play was that of an acquaintance, and not a friend. Finding that she could get no more from James except that Mrs. Montague was suffering from an attack of inflammation of the lungs, Di asked to see Mrs. Kent, but was told that the faithful maid was lying down after a sleepless night.

“Then give our kindest regards to Mr. Montague,” she said softly, “and tell him how *very* sorry we are, and if there is anything we can do, we shall be so very glad to help him in any way.”

Then she turned away, and Jack watched her from behind the curtain picking her way

over the untrodden snow with a light step, as if she did not think much of the difficulties in her path. He felt as if he *must* rush out and tell her how good it was of her to come so early through the cold, instead of hurrying home to her breakfast, and sending a footman with a sheaf of cards, as most people would have been content to do. It seemed so churlish and unkind to let her go without one word; but what did it matter? She would think him far more churlish, far more cruel before the end; and as the red ribbon in her sailor hat disappeared behind the first of the grand old elms, he went back to his cup of lukewarm coffee, with a despairing shrug of his shoulders. He had intended to steel himself against his first meeting with Di Witherington with all the powers of his self-control, but this trial had come upon him, before he had put on his armour, and he leant his elbow on the smooth white table-cloth, his head on his hand, in a state of utter discouragement. Only yesterday morning, he scarcely realised that he loved

her, but now his love had grown into a giant passion, which dwarfed the rest of his life.

All day long the front door was besieged by anxious callers, and yet nobody saw any one but the footman or butler. Jack sat by his mother's bed, willing to do anything in her service, and glad to be out of the way. Nobody could pursue him there but the doctor, with whom it was a relief to have a talk, for he was a well-educated, broad-minded man, whose sympathies had been widened, instead of narrowed by his profession. His grave dark eyes saw more than they were intended to; for, whilst Kent thought that "Mr. Jack's" altered looks were entirely owing to anxiety for his mother, Dr. Blaine suspected that there was something else in the back-ground. He noticed that when he gave a more cheering account of Mrs. Montague, Jack seemed relieved, and expressed his gratification warmly, but the look of utter depression remained fixed as if

printed ineffaceably on his face. It was not the first time that he had studied him as an interesting problem, and he considered that the problem was developing a greater amount of interest every day.

Lady Wildgrave, on the receipt of a telegram from her brother, hurried down in spite of exaggerated accounts of belated, snowed-up trains, and did not even wait for such ameliorations of the unpleasant journey as Lord Raymond's escort would have afforded her. Jack met her with the carriage, and as soon as she caught sight of his face, she seized his arm, panting in a panic of fear, unable to bring out a word.

He laid his hand on hers, and told her not to be frightened. He really thought his mother would pull through, with careful nursing.

"Then why did you look like that?" she asked with the fretfulness that sometimes accompanies great anxiety.

Instead of answering, he hurried her into

the brougham, and looked round for her maid, after he had carefully covered her up with all the wraps he could find.

“Stéfanie’s in bed. I told her to follow me as soon as she could get dressed, but I wouldn’t wait,” Em explained; and then she told him to get in quickly, and not to mind about the luggage, James would see to that. As they drove off, he bent down and kissed her, feeling especially drawn to his sister in his present loneliness of heart. But the smallest sign of affection was too much for her composure. Laying her head on his shoulder, irrespective of the fascinating bonnet which crowned her golden hair, she burst into a flood of tears, and sobbed as if she meant to sob for ever and ever. The telegram had come with a startling shock in the midst of her frivolous engagements, and she had been struck with remorse for having neglected her mother, whilst giving all her time to what she considered to be the claims of society.

“Oh, Jack, I’ve seen so little of her!” she

gasped between her tears. "I used to come so often, but I don't know how it is, I—I never seem to have time. It isn't that I don't love her just as much as ever."

"Of course, it isn't," he said tenderly, as he held her close to his side. "She never doubted you a bit. But Em, darling, pull yourself together, she mustn't see you cry."

"I will be quiet, indeed I will," with great earnestness, as she dried her eyes on a scrap of a handkerchief which seemed only capable of containing one tear. "But I couldn't cry in the train, because the guard put in two other people, and they would have stared so. I feel better now I've had it out?"

"And Wildgrave?" he asked with some curiosity, wondering if he had really turned over a new leaf, and not gone back to the old one.

"He has been so awfully good to me," looking up into his face with almost an expression of awe in her eyes. "Twice last week he dined at home alone with me, and said it was quite a

pleasant change. And I don't know what has come over him, but he is not half as keen about going out as he used to be, and one Sunday I *almost* thought he was coming to church with me !”

“I daresay he will settle down after he has had his fling,” Jack said quietly, although he asked himself, “Settle down to what? Take from him all the festive nothings on which he fritters his time, and an utter vacuum would be left. He has never fitted himself for anything more serious. He would be like a herring flapping helplessly about on land.”

When Lady Wildgrave crept into the sick-room on tip-toe, she was not as much shocked by the patient's appearance as she had expected to be. Owing to her high temperature, there was a pink flush on Mrs. Montague's cheeks, and her eyes were feverishly bright. She recognised her daughter at once, and gave her a loving smile ; but, when she attempted to speak, her cough came on with such vehemence, that En

watched her in a desperate fright, thinking every moment that she would choke.

The presence of his sister, although Jack did not thoroughly appreciate it, did him a great deal of good. It forced him to rouse himself, and pay some attention to the outer world, instead of sinking into the lowest depths of misanthropy. When Kent banished them both from the sick-room, he was obliged to give his whole attention to Em, for she could not bear to be left alone in her present state of fear and uneasiness. She came and sat with him in his sanctum, when he slipped away to have a quiet smoke. If he took up a book, she coaxed him into reading it out; whilst, on the other hand, if she wrote a letter, she would consult him as to the remarks she wished to make in it, although her correspondent might be unknown to him. Watching her with a kind but close scrutiny, he soon understood how the friendship with Dandy had grown as the months flew by into its present dangerous dimensions. She was a

woman, or rather a girl, who demanded constant attention ; and this she could never get from a husband who left her practically alone day after day. If she put on a new bonnet, she wished to be told that it was becoming ; if she were reading a novel, she liked to be asked if it were interesting ; if she had a trouble, however small, she craved for sympathy ; if she had a pleasure, she wanted somebody to share it with her ; and that "somebody" must be always ready to be at her beck and call. She must be the prime object of his thoughts, and his attention must never wander, his unpaid service must be given because it was a pleasure to have it accepted ; but she would mean to keep that pleasure within limits, she would intend to stand firm where other women had fallen, she would venture on rocks covered with sea-weed, because she chose to think herself so wonderfully sure-footed ! The self confidence of the "untried" is one of the greatest dangers in social life. Montague knew it, and his heart ached for his poor little

sister, who sat herself down in the post of danger, because she believed herself to have such abnormal powers of self-defence.

"Do you think it necessary to write to Wildgrave every day of the week?" he asked, because he was afraid that she had not written to him once, since her arrival at The Priory.

"Oh, dear no! He would think me such a bore if I did," she answered with a careless laugh. "When he is away, he honours me with a line, now and then, to say that he wants a rod or a gun sent after him, or to mention that he will be home at a certain hour. We've got far beyond the "I dreamt of you last night, I thought of you all day, I'm ever in a fright, because you are away." He knows I'm all right, and I feel sure he is the same. Nothing ever happens to either of us."

"But now that you are out of it all down here, I should have thought you would be dying to know how everything was going on?"

"Dandy is a capital correspondent. He keeps me posted up in everything. And

Wildgrave knows it, so there would be no good in his writing too."

"Penrose seems willing to save his cousin any amount of trouble," with a sarcastic smile.

Lady Wildgrave looked over her shoulder at him, with a sweetly pensive glance. "Dear old Dandy, life would be impossible without him!"

"Em!" in scandalised protest.

"Yes, Jack, I mean it," still with the serene smile that might have befitted an angel. "It is such a comfort to find a nice man always ready to fill up the blanks in your life."

"Your husband ought to do that," with a complete resumption of the "Modern Moraliser," which would have amused the subject under discussion immensely.

"But it is Wildgrave who makes them," with a little short-lived laugh, as it soon died away into a sigh.

"Wildgrave, be hanged!" muttered Jack, anxious to vent his anger on somebody, and as usual finding his brother-in-law handy for

the purpose ; but his thoughts were sent into a far different channel the next moment by the announcement made by the butler, that Colonel and Miss Witherington were in the drawing-room. Em threw down her fan, and giving a glance at a small Moorish mirror as she passed, went towards the door.

“ You are coming, Jack ? ” she asked, because she wondered why he showed so little alacrity.

He stooped over his pipe as if he had discovered some strange substance in the bowl.

“ No, I’m going to my mother.”

“ But she wouldn’t like you to disappoint the Colonel.”

“ Can’t help it,” hoarsely. “ Just the time when ‘ nurse ’ goes out for a walk.”

“ As if that mattered ! ” and with a slight shrug of her graceful shoulders, Lady Wildgrave followed Mason across the hall.

Mrs. Montague was gradually getting better, the fever subsided, her breathing became easier, and the tiresome cough, which seemed as if it would tear her to pieces, grew less incessant.

Jack began to regard her room as his only place of refuge, for there he was safe from being asked any troublesome questions. He could not go on for ever playing at "hide and seek" with his neighbours; and he met the Colonel constantly when he went out for a walk, as well as Mr. Kindersley.

"Never knew a fellow so devoted to his mother," Colonel Witherington remarked to the Rector, as they stood on the banks of a frozen lake in the grounds of The Wilderness, where a number of people were disporting themselves on skates. "I'll be hanged if he doesn't look ten years older than he did before she was ill."

"Nothing like anxiety for adding crows feet. I think he shuts himself up too much. You should get him to come up here—as far as I can recollect he was a splendid fellow on skates."

"Don't understand the man, you might think that Mrs. Montague had the plague from the way he fights shy of us all, or that she was

really at death's door. The frost has played the devil with the hunting," the Colonel said testily, "and he might just as well get all the fun he could out of the skating, but he's a queer fish."

"A very good fellow at heart," said the Rector warmly. "I tell you what, he wants something to rouse him. I'll get Vivian to stir him up about this School Board business. Do you know that Strangways has started operations in Dainton?"

The Colonel gave a whistle of dismay. "I thought that he had promised Di to give it up."

"Miss Di's a dear girl, but she's not a bit of a diplomatist," Mr. Kindersley said with a knowing look. "She could twist him round her finger, if she chose to go the right way to work; but it wouldn't do," shaking his head with a regretful sigh, as, failing Montague, the thought of the splendid opportunities she would have for taming the bear, if she were the mistress of Greytowers.

"I should rather think it wouldn't," exclaimed the Colonel indignantly, though he only guessed at half the Rector's thought. "The girl's as true as a die, and she couldn't make up to a man for the sake of getting anything in creation out of him, not even to save the whole lot of us from starving. It's against her nature, thank God," he added fervently as his eye followed his child as she skimmed lightly over the ice, looking like a robin red-breast on the wing, and with excusable pride he thought her the bonniest thing in the whole world of nature.

"Flo's much after the same pattern," said the Rector with a smile, as the young lady in question collided with a farmer, and was clasped in an involuntary, and unexpected, embrace by his extended arms. "She has a perfect passion for younger sons, and any fellow who can dub himself a detrimental has a sure pass-port to her favour."

"Well, a thoroughly practical woman, who thinks of nothing but the main chance, may be

useful, but she's my pet aversion. But come along, and let us talk to some of these good people," slipping his arm inside Kindersley's. "There's fat Mrs. Stone, let us go and make her laugh. She is sure to lose her balance, and come down a cropper."

"Yes, but if you crack a joke, Mrs. Stone will crack the ice, and that would upset all the others in more ways than one," remonstrated the Rector who did not approve of an involuntary ducking, when the weather was playing such pranks with the thermometer.

CHAPTER II.

THE POSTER ON THE WALL.

MR. STRANGWAYS was not the sort of man to hold his hand out of a merciful wish to spare the susceptibilities of his neighbours. It is possible that he had no particular desire for the increase of education in Dainton ; in fact, he had been known to say that it had its disadvantages, as the man who could not write was saved from the sin of forgery, and reading only put it into the labourer's head to decline the work for which he was fitted, and try for that for which he had not the slightest aptitude. But, as usual with most of us, he was acting from mixed motives, the most powerful of which was the fierce hatred he entertained for the Honourable and Reverend

Cyril Vivian. It is perhaps convenient for a man to shut his eyes, and hold his tongue, when the 'most flagrant abuses are going on under his very nose. People are likely to call him a nuisance if he lifts up his voice to amend them. If he succeeds in abolishing them, he gets very few thanks from those who suffered from them, and makes an enemy for life of the man to whose callousness they were due. On the other hand, if he fails, he had better start off by the very next train, for no one on either side will have a good word for him. But a parish-priest is absolutely bound to speak if he sees any flagrant wrong going on in the district under his charge; and Vivian was the last man to shirk one of his obvious duties.

Very little has been said about the inner workings of Mr. Strangways' large business. It had developed to an incredible extent during the last ten years, and had stretched out its claws over a great part of that suburb of Dainton which went by the name of "St.

Mary's," from the old grey church near the market-place. At first it began in the factory, an ugly square building of many floors, close by the river—a prosaic piece of realism, set down amongst the reeds and willows on the picturesque bank. It marred the beauty of the landscape, "it thrust forward the unlovely side of toil," it was a discord in what would have been otherwise a harmonious whole; and, although there never could be much poetry about boots and shoes, it struck a pathetic contrast between the beautiful, castellated turrets of Grey-towers, looking down with all the insolence of arrogant beauty from the midst of its gardens and hot-houses on the crest of the hill, on to that plain, unpretending building, surrounded by poverty-stricken hovels, where the "struggle for lifers," as the French call them, work and pinch, and almost starve on a wage that decreases as the cruel weeks follow one another. On the one side of the Derwent, the luxurious home of the manufacturer whose gold has been slowly made into a pile by the under-

paid labour of those who depend upon him ; on the other, the nest of ill-ventilated work-shops, where disease sits side by side with labour, and hope dies away into the torpor of despair, whilst each one of the "hands" works life, energy, and almost reason, away, to provide another luxury for the rich man's table, or a rare specimen for the garden which fosters his pride, through the un-hallowed profit drawn from under-paid labour. Peter Strangways was not a factor in the ordinary sense of the term, which means simply a collector of the goods of smaller dealers, for he was absolute owner of factories in Birmingham and Northampton, as well as Dainton ; but he acted as factor to the masters of the work-shops which had grown up round the factories, and in connection with them. He had a large warehouse near the docks, in which he stored his goods for the Colonies, and whenever he chose, he could send such a sudden influx of boots and shoes on the market as to lower the prices all round.

His name was accursed by the smaller manufacturers, whom he trod under foot in his race for wealth; the masters of work-shops were held in his iron grip, for they were obliged to accept any price that he chose to force upon them; and it is almost needless to say that the wages of the poor workmen dwindled like a child in consumption. The work chiefly consists of "knifing" and "finishing," the former requires some skill, whilst the latter can be done by "greeners" after only a fortnight's training. These men belong to no union, and therefore have no one to fight their battles. They slave from eighteen to twenty hours a day, and exist on a princely diet of bread and coffee. They are forced to sign a contract to work for a certain number of years, and a small sum is taken from their weekly wage, and kept as a deposit, in order to prevent them from going elsewhere to seek higher wages. This is a cruel shame, which requires the voice of a second Shaftesbury to right it. What is the use of spending precious

lives, and large sums of money in stamping out the slave-trade in Africa, whilst we allow Europeans to be treated no better than coolies, only a few yards from our own comfortable homes ?

Vivian's heart burnt within him, as he went from one miserable den to another, and found that human beings were lodged for the long hours of an endless day in stifling rooms, where the ceilings were so low as to touch the heads of the tallest, and where the air was so foul that it felt like a leaden weight on his chest. He talked to them, and read to them, and tried to lift them out of their state of mental stagnation ; but it was uphill work, and wore out his strength more than any other part of his daily duty. Newcome offered to take it upon himself, but this the Vicar declined, for he considered himself bound to undertake the most difficult work of the parish. At first he was always received with a frown by the masters, who thought that the parson would be sure to stir up discontent amongst the hands ;

but when they found that he only tried to raise their minds, without stopping their fingers, they gave him a sort of surly welcome.

Gradually he won his way into hearts that had grown hard as the hide of a rhinoceros from want of the solvent of sympathy, till many of the men listened for his footstep on the broken stair, as a girl might have longed for her lover's, and looked forward to his coming as the one bright spot in the long, dull day. He felt at last that he had really got hold of some of them—a few came to his night-school on Saturday evenings—and more than a few to the small church by the river, where the bright lights shone on weary wasted faces, and rough voices joined hoarsely, but with the heartiness dear to a priest's heart, in the mission-hymns. Still there were hundreds whose lives were on no higher level than that of the beast of burden—hundreds who were practically as great pagans as the favourites of Julian the Apostate; and they seemed to crush down all the natural

buoyancy of his mind whenever he thought of them. He could do nothing but wait and hope, telling himself that he ought to be very thankful if Heaven permitted him to gather in one sheaf after another, though at long intervals, instead of allowing the harvest to fail entirely. He was walking along the High Street, not taking much notice of the passers-by, except by absently raising his hat in answer to frequent greetings, when Mr. Strangways suddenly loomed in front of him, and pointing triumphantly with his thick black-thorn stick at a flaring poster on the wall, asked him if he saw that? Vivian gave a quick upward glance, and an involuntary shiver ran through him from head to foot, as he saw it announced in large blue letters on an orange-ground, that a meeting of the ratepayers of the parish of St. Mary's, Dainton, would be held in the public hall on the third instant, to decide whether the voluntary schools of the parish should be turned into Board schools, or no.

“I got fifty ratepayers to sign a petition,

carried it up myself to the Board, and this is the result," the manufacturer said, with a malicious sparkle in his eye. "What do you think of that for rapid work?"

"I call it devil's work," Vivian said quickly, his voice throbbing, his pale face flushing with the intensity of his feeling, as he struck the pavement with his stick. "What has this poor town done to you, that you should wish to rob it of its faith? If I had my way——" he stopped abruptly, and pulled himself together. The public street was not the place for a serious discussion, nor Strangways the sort of man with whom to have it.

"If you had your way, my dear sir, you wouldn't let the people of Dainton know so much as their A B C," Strangways answered with a sneer. "It doesn't require much reading to teach a man that the Church has traded on the ignorance of the people for centuries."

Vivian drew himself up. The flush had died from his face, and his will had completely

mastered his emotion. Calm and stern, he said quietly, "Wouldn't a little more reading have taught him quite the reverse? It is a fact, which no one can possibly ignore, that the Church kept the lamp of learning alight, when the rest of the world was in darkness. Good-evening."

"Stop a bit. I can't go into those times, but I can tell you this, that she's not going to keep a lamp for herself, and leave us to get on as best we can with a set of farthing dips. Not a bit of it. But look here," still standing in the Vicar's path, so as to keep him from getting away. "You haven't a chance, you know. Don't you think you had better give in?"

"I should be just as likely to sit down in the middle of the road, and ask that cart to drive over me," he said very quietly, but with a look on his sensitive, refined face, which told the manufacturer that in strength of will he had more than met his match.

As he stood before that slightly built man, endowed with the gentleness that comes of

good breeding, and the pluck that would have faced any odds for the sake of conscience—that intangible attribute which was never taken into the capitalist's calculations, Strangways felt Vivian's superiority keenly ; but the consciousness of his own inferiority only chafed him into a sullen rage. It incensed him that a fellow, whom he could seize by the scruff of his neck and shake as easily as a dog, should dare to brave him. "That may be tall talk, Mr. Vivian, but it's not common sense," he said roughly. "You mark my words, before many years have passed over our heads, the people of this town will be putting up a statue to the man who gave them a School Board."

"Then I hope you won't take a leaf out of Nebuchadnezzar's book, and expect me to fall down and worship it," with a slightly ironical smile.

"I don't expect anything from other people that I don't do myself," gruffly, scenting a sarcasm.

"I congratulate you on the smallness

of your expectations, yet I don't feel sure about the statue. But I must be off."

"Humph," taking the opportunity to be aggrieved. "I suppose you've no time to waste on your neighbours?"

"I've no time to waste at all," and raising his squash hat, he abruptly plunged into the midst of the traffic, and, with one or two narrow escapes, got safely across the road.

"There goes the pig-headedest parson you could find in the four quarters of the globe," muttered Strangways, looking after the Vicar, with a "nil admirari" expression. "I *do* hate obstinacy, it's so infernally caddish; but I'll carry this through just to spite him—see if I don't."

CHAPTER III.

“NOT BEATEN YET.”

AFTER the aforesaid notice appeared on the walls and hoardings of Dainton, events moved on apace. The meeting was held in the midst of the bitter weather, in the beginning of January, when no place was so enticing as one's own fire-side. But Jack Montague was in the state of mind which makes a man ready to do anything unpleasant, and to shrink from anything and everything that was the reverse. He had offered to drive Mr. Kindersley over in his dog-cart, but when he arrived at the Rectory, he found the master of the house hovering over the fire in his comfortable study, which seemed to have an irresistible attraction for him.

"Have a cup of coffee, Jack? I don't think it's quite time."

"Thanks, I've just had one," with the fortitude of an ancient Roman—"and if we want to get there by eight o'clock, I think we ought to start at once. The roads are in a shocking state."

"Sit down whilst I get into my coat, and tell me how your mother is."

But Jack was inflexible. He knew that if he once subsided into the depths of the arm-chair which the Rector pulled forward, they would soon be engrossed in a comfortable chat, whilst both horse and coachman were freezing outside, and Vivian was thinking that they had basely deserted him.

The Rector smiled amusedly at having to learn his duty from his eccentric parishioner, and allowed himself to be driven off into the bleak darkness, muffled up to the brim of his hat, with only an aperture in front to leave him the use of his eyes. Nothing would really have induced him to stay away; and if Jack

had shown the slightest sign of weakness, the parts would soon have been reversed. The hall, which was a good-sized one, was not half filled, but Mr. Vivian and his two curates, Mr. Strangways, and some of the leading tradesmen were already gathered on the platform. Vivian's face lighted up with pleasure as he saw Kindersley and Montague making their way up the narrow channel between the seats, for his spirits were at a very low ebb, owing to the Dissenters having shown themselves more eager to brave the weather than the Churchmen. He saw that it would be almost impossible to gain a majority, but if the worst came to the worst, he had a last card to play, and a lurking hope that it might turn out trumps.

Mr. Strangways opened the proceedings by a ponderous speech, in which he appeared in the character of universal benefactor. His disinterestedness he supposed to be patent to all, for, in the present stage of the matter, he need not spend one brass farthing on the education of

his neighbour's children, and never having entered the bonds of matrimony, he was neither blessed nor cursed with any of his own. Therefore he could conscientiously say that he was actuated by no selfish motive, when he proposed to introduce a School Board into the parish of St. Mary's. With himself, then, it was purely a matter of principle, not of pocket. Jack's eye was upon him, and he knew it. It made him stammer just at the wrong moment, and a derisive titter came from boys in the back seats. He raised his head, gave a savage glance in their direction, and then went on, in a still louder voice, to assert that it was a well-known fact that parsons were the most unpractical of men. "Who but a parson," he asked, "would stand up for a school which was already crippled with debt, and even in that crippled state, needed enlargement? And how was this need to be met? He would be very sorry for the poor builder when he sent in his bill, and expected to be paid. This was the natural result of the voluntary system, which pressed unfairly on a

few supporters, whereas a general rate must be most thoroughly impartial. But it must be evident to any one with two ideas in his head, that the opposite side had no idea of fair-play. They wanted to force their doctrines down the throats of the Dissenters, whether they choked them or not; but he, for one, meant to tell them plainly that the Dissenters were not going to stand it any longer. (Loud applause.) The Church had tried to muzzle them; and now was the time for throwing that muzzle away, for the Church's day was over. Her part as the prim, highly esteemed, exclusive school-mistress, was played out, and the birch rod which she so dearly loved to wield would rot on a rusty nail. (Cheers and groans.) He had, therefore, the pleasure of moving a resolution in favour of forming a School Board in the parish of St. Mary's, Dainton. (Cheers.)

Mr. Findley, a stolid, thick-set man, a Dissenter of an indefinite type, with more substantiality in his figure than in his opinions, begged to second the resolution so ably pro-

posed by Mr. Strangways. He had no wish, he was sure, to be offensive to any one (with a glance at the group of clerics), but he thought it was time for the large body of Nonconformists of that town to stand up for their rights. Therefore he had great pleasure in seconding the resolution for a School Board, and he sat down with great promptitude on the floor, having mistaken the position of his chair. He was helped up in quite a fatherly manner by Mr. Strangways, but a few boys, who evidently had no reverence even "for a leading tradesman," burst into a shout of laughter.

As soon as it had been sternly suppressed, Vivian stood up to move a counter-resolution, to the effect that a School Board was not needed in the parish of St. Mary's, Dainton. He spoke well and fluently, being so entirely wrapt up in his subject that he was saved from the speech-maker's plague of self-consciousness. He answered Strangways point by point, striving after no oratorical effect, but meeting every audacious assertion with a

complete and forcible contradiction. He was able to assure Mr. Strangways that the burden of debt had been almost entirely removed from the St. Mary's Schools, by the generosity of his friend, Mr. Montague, who had presented him with a substantial cheque. (Loud cheers.) As to the unfairness of the present system towards Dissenters, he considered that it was just the other way. Their scruples had been so tenderly cared for by the Liberal Government of the day, that the grievous yoke of the conscience-clause had been laid on the necks of unwilling Churchmen; and there was no longer any reason why Dissenters should not send their children to the voluntary schools, because, in the schools which they themselves supported Churchmen were forbidden to teach the doctrines of their own Church, except at an early hour when attendance was not enforced. That conscience-clause he considered as big a blot on the memory of those who framed it, and forced it through the House, as the Massacre of St. Bartholomew on that of

Charles the Ninth. The Liberals sold their religion for an election-cry, and turned their backs on the Church of their forefathers, for the sake of the Nonconformist vote. (Groans ; some dissentient voices cried out, "No, no.") "It is true." He turned upon them with an indignant flash in his eyes, and a passionate throb in his voice. "If you doubt me, listen to this. A year or two ago, a pupil-teacher was dismissed by a School Board because she had ventured to teach the Apostles' Creed. The bread was taken from that poor girl, because she taught the Faith for which the ancient Fathers of our Church suffered exile, torture, and death, and counted the world, the favour of Court, and Emperor, as nothing in comparison with it. Refuse this School Board, as you would the infection of small-pox, if it were offered you. Under the mask of undenominationalism, it threatens death to all religion worthy of the name. What happened at Birmingham the other day? When the Board was formed, it set its blasphemous foot

down, and refused to allow one word of religious instruction to be taught in its school. But, thank God! that was going too far for the popular conscience, apathetic as it usually is. There was a general outcry. Fathers and mothers shrank from having their children practically brought up as atheists; and, in answer to an indignant protest, the Board conceded a wretched quarter of an hour for the most important part of the day's work! There are still some schools in Wales where party-spirit runs to fever-heat; where God is forgotten, because of the wretched quarrels of man, and where the hapless children are taught their duty to themselves, maybe, but to no one else, either in earth or Heaven. (Groans.) And this is tolerated in a Christian land!" He paused, drew his hand over his forehead, and gave one quick glance over the faces before him. He could see that many of his opponents were uncomfortable, and that none of them dared to look him in the face. He knew that they had been brought there

to fight against "a High-Church fad;" and that they were not a little startled to find that the religion which was as dear to them as to Churchmen was absolutely at stake. He put this to them in forcible language, and every word went home; but he could not be sure that their change of feeling would appear in a change of vote. When men have taken root in one groove, it is difficult to lift them bodily into another. He went on to show them that the voluntary system was, after all, the fairest, for no one was *asked* for a penny. Men gave out of good-will and generosity, but they were free to give or to withhold, just as they liked; whilst a rate pressed upon the unwilling as well as the willing, the poor as well as the rich. To a man endowed with this world's goods to such an extent as Mr. Strangways, it would make but little difference; whilst to the clerk, with a small salary and a numerous family, it would be an intolerable impost. And yet people have the audacity to rave about its fairness! Mr. Strangways had implied that

the present schools ought to be given up, because they wanted enlarging—a curious conclusion to draw from what would generally be considered a proof of their success. Five hundred pounds—quite a paltry sum to a man of any property—would set them in order for the next generation ; whilst four or five thousand, at least, would be wanted for purchasing a site and building a handsome Board school on it ; and these thousands of pounds would have to come out of the ratepayers' pockets, from the struggling tradesman as well as from the rich man with a balance at his bankers. Not one of them would be exempt. There was the hardness of it. If it were a mere question of economy, common-sense would answer unhesitatingly in favour of the scheme which only involved a tenth of the expense ; but his opposition rested on infinitely higher grounds than that. Both schemes had been on their trial through the length and breadth of England, and he contended that the one had failed whilst the other succeeded. The real

object of education, he supposed everybody would acknowledge, was to fit girls and boys for the life before them; and in this the Board-system had lamentably failed. It did more than not fit them—it absolutely *unfitted* them; and the truth of the assertion could be proved, again and again, by hard-working mothers, who found their children returned on their hands, too “fine” to turn to honest work, and help to keep the roof over their heads; whilst their ideas soared far above their humble station, and their realities sank far beneath it, from the dignity of toil to the degradation of discontented idleness. (Cheers.) And is there anything more contemptible than the girl or boy, man or woman, who will grumble and starve, because too proud to work? It may surprise you to hear that our system of education, superior, as I believe it to be, has also the merit of being cheaper. The usual cost of each scholar in a Board school is two-pounds, four-and-sixpence-halfpenny; the cost of each of ours only one-pound, sixteen-

and-fourpence-halfpenny. And why is this? Because Boards are proverbially lavish with other people's money; and it is so easy with a stroke of a pen to vote hundreds of pounds to be spent on such luxuries as pianos, whilst the poor clerk or industrious tradesman has to pinch, and deny himself some of the necessities of life, in order to meet an exorbitant rate, levied according to a rich man's folly! And, surely, some debt of gratitude is due to the Church for her work in the past. She was working faithfully and untiringly whilst politicians talked; and what has she done, after centuries of successful labour, to have it rudely snatched out of her loving hands? *Nothing.* I challenge you to mention a single reason why. And in the name of Justice, which appeals to all Englishmen—in the name of that Christianity which we all profess—I ask your support for the motion which I bring forward, “That no School Board is needed in the parish of St. Mary's, Dainton.” (Loud cheers.)

"Capital!" whispered Kindersley. "You haven't left them a leg to stand on."

"That will do no good if Strangways supplies them with crutches; but Montague, I fancy, will give them a bit of his mind," and Vivian, smiled as he looked up at Jack's stern face. To judge by his expression, the piece of mind he had prepared for the edification of the meeting was not a very pleasant one. He held his head up, and looked down his nose at the manufacturer, as he declared "That he had the greatest pleasure in seconding Mr. Vivian's motion, more especially as he was convinced that the whole matter was a purely personal one in the present instance, as it had been a mere party question in times past. He considered that the proposal for a School Board came very badly from a man who had never shown the slightest interest in education, or spent a single penny on any one of the schools in Dainton. (Hear, hear.) Surely if his interest were sincere, it was strange that no educational palace had reared its head on one of the

neighbouring hills for those of his own sect. If he were so tender of the Unitarian conscience, as he professed himself to be, let him build a Unitarian School (cheers), and leave those of true Christians alone. Tenderness that began and ended in talk was an inexpensive article, in which the most parsimonious man could indulge with the utmost recklessness; and that Mr. Strangways' vaunted sentiment was of this nature, he could prove to them in a few words. Only last autumn, I offered to put down a cheque for one hundred pounds for our schools, if he would meet it with another for five hundred for those of his own denomination. Did he jump at the offer? No, he gave a leap the other way." (Laughter.) His speech was short, but very much to the point, and before he sat down, he said that as a trifling help to the present schools, he would guarantee to give them a cheque for fifty pounds for five years, an announcement that was received with loud applause.

Mr. Harding, a thin-faced man with a

pointed nose, who was Strangways' factotum, delivered himself of a diatribe against the Church and all her ways. He declared that education was a treasure that she wrapped in a napkin, and locked in a drawer, because she was afraid that if it popped out, like a Jack-in-the-box, the men whom she had gulled would find out that those things, she had preached about as solid truths, were nothing but fables she had foisted on their credulity, &c. &c.

The Rev. Richard Kindersley quietly extinguished him, and said that so far from wishing to stop education, he was ready at that moment to vote for any Christian scheme by which the children of the deserving poor should be educated free of all cost. But, as he saw no other way of stopping the tide of secularisation, which was trying to wreck Christianity, than by supporting the Voluntary Schools, he proposed to give the Vicar, who had done such noble work in Dainton, the small sum of twenty-five pounds for a period of five years for the good

of his schools, with the heartiest of prayers for their success. (Cheers.)

"Any more subscriptions?" inquired Mr. Strangways with a sneer; and then, in a lower voice he asked the man next him, a highly respectable grocer, "Why he hadn't the pluck to pitch into 'em a bit?"

"I've the pluck, Mr. Strangways, but I haven't the gift of the gab," Mr. Merton said frankly. "Them parsons get it by free use of the pulpit. But, what impudence of that Harley to come up here!"

Harley was a red-faced, red-haired little man, in the same line of life, but in a much smaller street than Mr. Merton's. He scrambled on to the platform in a great hurry and flurry, and making an awkward bow to the clergy, and indignantly ignoring the opposite side, said he didn't see why the gentlemen should do everything, and he wasn't going to let them think but that there was some of the tradesmen in Dainton who was grateful for past kindness, and ready to stand by the Vicar

through thick and thin. "And I'm not ashamed to offer him five pounds out of my own pocket for the school, where my girl learnt to be the dutifullest daughter, and the kindest-hearted, sensiblest child in the Parish," he said with a break in his voice. "And, hold hard, Mr. Vivian, you'd better take it at once," diving into the depths of a very deep pocket, bringing the sovereigns out one by one, he counted them out on the table and shoved them towards the Vicar. Vivian shook him heartily by the hand, amidst the rapturous applause of his supporters, and told him that he should prize that five pounds more than all the rest. The chairman, anxious to put an end to this incident, called for a show of hands on the resolution for forming a School Board in the parish of St. Mary's, Dainton. Strangways' broad face beamed with satisfaction, for, to Jack's intense indignation, the resolution was carried by a large majority. He did not know most of the people by sight, so was not aware that the Dissenters and anti-religionists far out-

numbered the Churchmen ; and he had taken it for granted that Vivian's arguments would have penetrated the thickest brain amongst them, and carried conviction with them. The defeat was a terrible blow to him, and he felt desperately inclined to hurl the ink-stand into Strangways' face, just to take some of his "infernally cheek out of him," as he saw him get up from his seat, with the importance of a Napoleon.

"Well," he said, looking round as if he were counting the slain, and at the same time drawing on his fur-lined coat, with an evident appreciation of its warmth, "We've brought this piece of business to a very pretty conclusion ; and you, sir," turning to the Vicar with that delicacy which was his main characteristic: "You wouldn't take my advice, so you've got yourself jolly well beaten for your pains."

"Not beaten yet," Vivian said quietly, as he handed a paper to the chairman, containing a demand signed by ten ratepayers that the question should finally be decided by a poll of the whole parish.

Strangways was furious, but the chairman was legally bound to accept it; and the summoning officer, who was better known as the clerk of the Union, a dapper little man, with a high collar, announced over the edge of that highly starched article, that a poll would be taken on that day fortnight.

This announcement was received with many signs of approval by the discomfited Churchmen; and some of the Dissenters, whose minds were uneasy, saw in the silent witness of a secret vote, a convenient way of pacifying their consciences.

"There's some supper waiting for you all at 'The Goat's Head.'"

As Jack was elbowing his way through a narrow passage to a side door, he caught these words, which were addressed by Strangways in a gruff whisper to one of his principal supporters, and turned indignantly to the Vicar, "There's bribery for you."

Vivian smiled, and shrugged his shoulders; but at the same moment, his sleeve was

plucked hold of by Jeremy, a tobacconist, whose shop the three clerics had patronised out of charity, and whom he was therefore surprised to see amongst the ranks of his opponents. "Mr. Vivian, just listen to me," he said eagerly. "I didn't care a ha'porth of shag for this 'ere School Board bisness, but Strangways he comes to me, and says: 'If you hold up your hand for a School Board on Thursday, I'll get my men to buy their baccey at your little place.'"

"Where was your conscience, Jeremy?" with a gentle reproof in his eyes.

"Please sir, I'll remember my conscience when it comes to the secret woting," with a knowing wink, as he dropped behind.

CHAPTER IV.

“ISN'T DANDY POACHING?”

THE result of the meeting cast dismay upon Vivian's most eager supporters. Di Witherington sat with her hands dropped on her lap, and said she was like the Daughter of Babylon, wasted with misery; but as she showed no signs of growing thinner, Flora told her that she was not acting up to the *rôle*, so she had better choose another, in which her talents would be more conspicuous.

“Could anything be more unfortunate than father's being kept at home by a wretched attack of gout?” Di asked ruefully, as she condescended to pick up her knitting.

“Yes, the weather which kept *heaps* of people from going. But, I say, what are we

to do? Time is flying, and the enemy are probably hard at work," and Flo, who was seated at the moment on the floor in the old school-room at the Rectory, sprang to her feet as if she were anxious then and there to be up and doing. "I've no patience with Jack. He looks positively tragic, as if he were just about to order a funeral for all our hopes."

"Mr. Vivian says we have a very good chance," Di remarked, as she looked out of the window on to the snow-covered garden. "You see the great Bear is very unpopular just now—there has been a further reduction of prices, so that the poor Greeners will soon be slaving for nothing."

"I don't think Greeners have a vote, but, nevertheless, the Bear ought to be flayed alive, and I should like to assist at the process," cried Flo, with a vindictive flash in her eyes. "It makes me wild to think of the wretch feasting on turtle-soup and all that sort of thing, whilst he is starving these poor helpless creatures to death!"

"The factory-hands are grumbling that they don't get the wages they used to; and Mr. Newcome says, if the weather weren't so bad, he believes the clickers and finishers would strike."

"I wonder what Jack says," said the Rector's daughter, with a slight smile, for it used to be her friend's habit to quote him as her chief authority.

"I am sure I don't know," with a sudden elevation of her chin. "The clergy go amongst the people more than any one else, so they naturally know more about them. But here comes Phil—shall we go down and meet him?"

Flo agreed, and the trio were soon gathered round Mrs. Kindersley's sofa in the drawing-room, eagerly discussing their plan of action. Phil had brought them the lists drawn out by the committee; and they put their names to the streets which they undertook to canvass.

"Montague says that the only time to catch the men is after dark, but, of course, you can't

be wandering about Dainton then, so he must trust you to get over the wives."

"Much good that would do, when it is the men who vote," objected Di. "You could take care of us, Phil."

"Yes, but if you are going in different directions, I couldn't cut myself in two."

"Thanks, I can always take care of myself," put in Flo, as a sudden remembrance of Miss Kingston gave a chill to her manner.

"Not half so well as I can do it for you," looking full into her dark eyes, with a smile in his own.

"Do, please, be business-like," remonstrated his sister, who, now that her own love-affair had gone wrong, thought any sentimentality on the part of others absurdly childish. "Which is the committee-room, where we are to go and report progress?"

"At Abinger's—you know he is choir-master of St. John's," he added for Mrs. Kindersley's benefit. "He has thrown himself heart and soul into the business, and Mrs

Abinger promises to have a hot cup of tea ready for any canvasser who comes in after four."

"She deserves a medal," exclaimed Flora, with enthusiasm.

"And, by-the-bye, the Wildgraves are coming to The Priory—she wants to see her mother, and he and Penrose are dying for some decent skating."

"Rather much for Mrs. Montague, I should think," said Mrs. Kindersley, in her gentle voice.

"So Montague thought, and I offered to put up Penrose. Mother won't object, I hope."

Di opened her eyes in dismay. "I hope not," she said, drily; but she felt very uncomfortable when she had to break the news to Mrs. Witherington that "the bold, bad man" was to be lodged under their most respectable roof, for the space of a few days. That virtuous matron was, however, equal to the occasion. She assumed the air of a martyr

and said many disagreeable things in a plaintive voice, as if she scarcely had the strength to combat the contrariness of the world in general, and her own family in particular ; but, inwardly, she was rather pleased at having an opportunity of improving the sinner at her leisure. She had a gigantic faith in her own power of improving others, without any adequate basis to build it on ; whilst her child seemed to do infinite good by one kind word, or a single bright smile, and yet was supported by no overweening belief in her own sweet self.

Philip Witherington was delighted at the turn affairs had taken. The long promised dance was to come off on the next Tuesday, and nobody could deny that the two Wildgraves and Penrose would be most pleasant additions to it. Di felt no excitement about anything at the present moment. Skating, dancing, canvassing, all had lost much of their charm ; but she gave up nothing, in spite of this failure of interest. Bravely she carried

out the plan of her life as if nothing had happened. "And what had happened?" she asked herself indignantly. "Was she to mope and hang her head because one friend had forsaken her?" It was not as if he had ever said one word of love to her. It was her own fault if she had mistaken his friendly interest for something deeper, and she had only been a fool for her pains; but she would be on her guard for the future, and take great care never to make such a mistake again. And then she would throw back her proud little head, and see the hills from her window through a mist of tears; but the tears were kept back by her determined will. And though her cheeks lost some of their bloom through the trouble on her mind, she never allowed herself to cry, or to whisper one word of her wonder and perplexity to her bosom friend. She was indignant with herself for feeling her wounds, and she was resolved to hide them from the world, as if they were some disgusting sores; and she succeeded so well on the Tuesday night, that

Jack, who had dragged himself there because he dared not face the storm of inquiry as to why he had not come, was completely taken in. He saw her performing her part as hostess in her usual charming fashion, forgetting nobody but himself. Yes, she was as bright, as happy, as lovely as ever, and the only difference in her was that her eyes never strayed in his direction, and she never gave him so much as one smile as she passed. And no wonder, as he told himself again and again. With one excuse after another, he had kept away from The Wilderness, ever since that fatal night when he had first discovered that Richard Moseley was Mrs. Witherington's son. All the business arrangements about the canvassing, in which it would have been such a delight to consult together, he had carried on through Phil. Although known to be fond of skating, he had kept aloof from the cheerful party on the lake, and gone to skate with friends he did not care for over much, at an inconvenient distance.

His conduct must seem inexplicable to her, and by this time she must needs look upon him as a faithless friend, infinitely less worthy of notice than a stranger. Her low, sweet laugh, as she answered some queer remark of Dandy's, had the reverse of an exhilarating effect upon him, though he had told himself, just before stepping into the brougham which conveyed the Wildgraves and himself to their destination, that he should be perfectly resigned to the desolateness of his own lot, if he could be convinced that she was content with hers. And yet, as he leant against the wall, and watched the well-matched pair—Penrose bending down to talk in that undertone which is so effective with women, and evidently making himself particularly agreeable, whilst Di listened, her upturned face full of interest, her laughing eyes glancing straight up into those above her sunny-brown head—he felt as miserable and as unreasonably angry as possible. Wasn't the fellow content with making Em the talk of London? Must he come

down here to fool an innocent girl who knew nothing of him, and his objectionable ways?

“Jack, don’t stand there like a monument of misery, but dance with me, if you won’t with any one else,” said Lady Wildgrave imperatively. She was, as usual, the best-dressed woman in the room, and one of the most charming; and it was certainly no lack of partners that brought her to her brother’s side. But she had caught sight of his sorrowful face in the midst of a delightful waltz, and had got rid of her partner through an artful manœuvre, on purpose to be able to rouse him.

“Nonsense, Em. I’m a horrible stick.”

“You used to dance all right; so be quick, or the waltz will be over.”

He was obliged to submit, and was soon whirling round the room, “just like any other empty-headed fool,” he said to himself angrily.

“Bravo, Jack!” exclaimed Lord Wildgrave, with a twinkle in his eye. “Quite refreshing

to see you come down to a level with ordinary folk. But, look here, is not Dandy poaching on your preserves?"

"I've no preserves except those at The Priory," he said shortly, whilst Em shot a glance at her husband which ought to have annihilated him on the spot, and dragged her brother away, like a small tug towing a man-of-war. In consequence of a remark she made to him a few minutes later, he went up to Di, and asked for the pleasure of a dance. He might have been begging her to screw some instrument of torture a little tighter, from the look on his face, and the tone of his voice. She gave him one startled look of earnest inquiry, then, seeing nothing to soften her feelings in the expression of his face, gave the answer that he knew was inevitable, "So sorry, but my card is full." And yet, when he heard it, he felt as if he had received a slap on his face.

Just at that moment Phil came up, swinging a programme in his hand.

“First extra,” he said, looking from one to the other, with some anxiety on his good-looking face. “Now then, choose the partners you like best.” There was no help for it. Jack felt that if he did not try his chance again, it would be little short of an insult. Hesitating, like a bashful boy—although the genus is quite extinct—he asked again, and was not refused; but as Di slipped her small hand within his arm, the blood fled from her cheeks to her heart, which began to throb tumultuously. It is doubtful if either of them enjoyed that dance at all, for the pleasure of it was quite outbalanced by the pain. It seemed such a poor travesty of all the other times when they had danced together, when every pause between the turns had been filled up with such pleasant, cheerful talk, that it was almost a pity to break it off in order to go on waltzing. Now, when they stopped for a breathing space, Di’s ready flow of eager confidences was like a stream dammed at its very source. She felt that there was not a single

topic that she could touch on safely, for any of the most appropriate ones involved a reproach for his neglect, and that her pride forbade.

"Rather good music, don't you think?" she asked, taking refuge in a common-place.

"Capital; but it's the same set of men as usual, isn't it?" throwing a glance at the small detachment of the well-known band which appeared at all gatherings of any note in the neighbourhood. It was an answer without any tact, calculated to nip the first bud of the conversation; and she resented it by utter silence, as she unfurled a white lace fan which Phil had given her as a Christmas present.

Jack cleared his throat, as if he were about to make a speech on a platform. "I believe you are going to be good enough to canvass?" he began abruptly.

"Certainly I am," without raising her eyes.

"I hope you will take care never to be in Dainton after dark."

"On the contrary, I shall make a point of

not going till the men have come home. I don't like my finest remarks to miss fire," with an air of the utmost independence.

"You won't think of going alone with Flo?" earnestness almost conquering his stiffness.

"If you are in the least interested in the subject, I can tell you that I shall have a most satisfactory escort."

His only answer to this comforting piece of intelligence, was a huge sigh; after which they went on with the waltz, as dancing seemed easier than talking.

He watched her afterwards, looking immensely amused at some nonsense the Viscount was indulging in for her benefit, and never guessed that even as she laughed so cheerfully, she was saying to herself, "What is it? What on earth have I done? Will he never be the same again?"

CHAPTER V.

“THE DELIGHTS OF CANVASSING.”

DAINTON was by no means an ideal town to canvass. The inhabitants' wits had been sharpened by the incessant competition that went on in every line of business, from the prosperous linen-draper, with “the last confection from Paris” in his window, to the “greener,” toiling for twenty hours a day, in constant fear lest a new fellow should come and step into his shoes. There was an utter absence of that bashfulness which generally consumes the agricultural labourer, when addressed by beauty of high degree. In place of it there was a great readiness to express an opinion, and to stick by that opinion with the obstinacy of ignorance posing as knowledge. Vivian said that the ladies ran a great chance of being

insulted, but the girls only laughed at what they chose to call his old-fashioned prejudices, and even intimated that if they were so unfortunate as to meet with discourtesy, they hoped they would be able to survive it.

It would have required a great deal of ill-usage to discourage their zeal, which far outstripped that of most of their male friends. The skating proved too great an attraction for the latter, who said that ice was a slippery customer in more ways than one. Whenever you had made up your mind to enjoy yourself, or to practise some new feat on the outside edge, the frost vanished and a dismal thaw set in, so that they felt obliged to make the most of it whilst they could get it. The girls had been skating all the afternoon, but when daylight began to fail, and the world to narrow into one large sheet of ice surrounded by dusky woods, they tore themselves resolutely away from the friends who were so eager to detain them. Lord Wildgrave, who with several others had escorted

them over the snow to where the pony-cart and dog-cart were waiting in the drive, thought Dandy a lucky man as he seated himself by Miss Witherington's side, and behind the highly prized Jumbo, and wished he had volunteered his services.

"Good luck to you, Miss Witherington," he said as he was tucking in the rugs. "That fellow Strangways will throw up the sponge when he hears of this."

"Not he," laughed Di; "he would back gold against any amount of feminine impudence. Good-bye; and don't cut up the ice too much for us to-morrow."

"I'm too much cut up, myself," with his handkerchief to his eyes.

"The Daintonites *are* in luck," groaned Captain Mayne, who longed to pull Philip Witherington out of his own cart, and seize his seat by Flo. "Don't you think, Miss Kindersley, you could come over to——, and canvass the barracks? I'd stake my head that they would vote for you to a man."

"I'm afraid they are not ratepayers in the parish of St. Mary's," with a demure shake of her head. "Now Phil, let us be off."

"All right ; we'll lead the way," and with a flourish of his whip, he started off Paragon at a good pace, whilst the pony came trotting merrily after them. The skaters went back to their skating, and no one who saw Captain Mayne's devoted attention to the little Viscountess, could have imagined that he was wishing to be six miles away in the dirty slums of Dainton. Lord Wildgrave amused himself with a golden-haired widow — Mrs. Loraine, who was staying in a neighbouring house, and who seemed to have turned up on purpose to oblige him. He was accustomed to being cordially received wherever he appeared ; and he could not understand why the Rector of Derwent's Cray looked as reserved as a sentry on duty, whenever he tried to have a chat with him. He thought Flo a jolly little girl—he knew that her father was a great chum of Montague's,

and he liked the look of him—but he supposed that he had imbibed a double dose of clerical starch, which made him as unapproachable as a giraffe with a poker down its neck. It never occurred to him that a priest, who was one of the most earnest combatants in the ceaseless war of Right *versus* Wrong, must naturally feel a strong moral repulsion for an empty-headed worldling, who would seem to him an example of unbridled sin. He had quite recovered from his fit of penitence, and had relapsed into the comfortable conviction that he was a thoroughly good-hearted chap—who would stick by a chum—do anything in the world for a woman—and never “funk” a foe—and he failed to add—lavish his money as if he had never to render an account of it in any other world but this. At the present moment, he considered himself a pattern of the domestic virtues, because he had run down with his wife for a quiet little visit to his mother-in-law, forgetting that he had been driven out of London by the crowded state of the ice which

spoilt one of his favourite amusements. So he made himself vastly agreeable to the widow, nodded good humouredly to his wife whenever she flew past him, with a bright colour in her cheeks, her pretty lips parted in her breathless haste; and between the pauses of a disjointed conversation, whilst looking tenderly into a pair of grey eyes which were too far open for his taste, gave a sentimental thought or two to a pair of dark ones in London fringed by the longest lashes he had ever seen.

Mrs. Witherington stood for some time on the bank, and watched the skaters with much amusement, allowing herself to enjoy all the humorous incidents which are sure to occur on any piece of ice that is not reserved for the members of a club, and chatting without any of her usual acridity with any friend or acquaintance who came up. This was all because there was no loving daughter to say, "Mother dear, it would do you all the good in the world to come out;" no affectionate son to remark, "It's so jolly down there, mother,

I'm sure you would enjoy it;" but only a gouty husband tied at home by an excruciating foot, and fretting at his enforced imprisonment, who thought that as he had got to stay in the house, every one else ought to do the same, and who told her that she would catch her death of cold standing in six inches of snow, to see a lot of people make fools of themselves. That was quite enough for Mrs. Witherington, but she went with the utmost alacrity, facing the biting wind and the bitter cold, with a heroism which would have been admirable if it had not sprung from perversity.

The canvassers meanwhile had put up their traps at the "White Hart," and started off bravely on foot. Di was inspired that afternoon by a spirit of reckless audacity; and Lord Raymond, who had never been afraid of anybody in his life, except, perhaps, of a Scotch nurse, who was the terror of the Duchess's nursery, supported her to the best of his ability. Sometimes she was very grave, and alluded to conscience as the surest guide, and the Vicar

as its best monitor, telling a hesitating tradesman that he could expect no blessing from heaven, if he ranged himself on the side of the atheists and free-thinkers on the day of the poll. This the worthy grocer translated into a threatened loss of the gentry's custom, unless he voted the right way; and he promptly declared that he had strong views on the subject, and he meant to support the parson, if he found that such a course could square with his conscience.

"You see, Mr. Strangways is rather interfering with other things besides religion," she went on diplomatically. "I've heard that he insists upon all his hands buying their groceries at Granby's."

"You've hit the right nail on the head, Miss," he burst out excitedly. "He's taken our trade from us, as far as he could; and Harding's man, as I call him, makes the wickedest charges for tea and sugar to them as can't afford to pay."

"Not content with your trade, he wants to

pilfer your religion, as well," said Lord Raymond slowly. "Are you going to let him?"

"Not me, sir; I'd see him in his coffin first."

"He fancies he holds you all between his finger and thumb."

"Then he shall drop me like a red-hot coal, or I'll burn him to the bone. Lord it over me, indeed! I should like to see 'im try it on," with his stubby chin in the air.

"He is quite sure that the whole of St. Mary's will vote for him," put in Di cunningly.

"Then he'll be mightily disappointed. We ain't a set of door-mats for him to trample under foot; and if he tries it, we'll rise up and give him a slap in the face."

"And a slap in the face from a door-mat would be a very unpleasant thing," said Dandy, with a grin.

"It was only a figger of speech, sir," rather afraid that the "figger" in question was un-

suitied to his dignity as one of the leading tradesmen.

"A beautiful metaphor, Mr. Figgins; you do yourself gross injustice."

The grocer was delighted, for in the recesses of his heart, he prided himself on the elegance of his language, and he always had a lurking suspicion that his fellow-townsmen did not appreciate it at its proper worth.

"I'd rather be unjust to myself than to my neighbours," he said, with conscious pride. "You see as how it's all a matter of trade. Between you and me, sir, there's nothing h'elewating in a boot or shoe. You can't get an ounce of sentiment out of 'em. I'd defy you to do it."

"No more you can out of a pound of raisins," reflected Di; but Lord Raymond saw his opportunity, and seized it.

"Very true, Mr. Figgins," he said gravely, as his eyes roamed over the various contents of the well-stocked shop. "How different it is with yours! That pound of tea," pointing

with his stick to a packet on the counter, "carries your mind at once from the sordid cares of business to the blue-gowned Chinese, picking the fragrant leaves from his garden under a cloudless sky. That packet of sugar wafts you to a grove of tall canes, where the negro, freed by the voice of civilisation from the fear of the overseer's lash, or the fangs of his blood-hounds, only does just as much work as he likes, and sleeps half the day away. Why, there's a delicate taste of poetry in everything connected with grocery, that you would never find in shoe-leather."

"Oh! come away," murmured Di, "or I shall disgrace myself."

"You are right, sir," said Mr. Figgins, with a gratified smirk; "but it isn't many gentlemen as 'ud go into the foundation of the identical like that. My vote's at the Vicar's service, and you may tell that to the whole of Dainton, if you like," he added in a glow of self-sacrifice, as he bowed his visitors to the

door. "I value my conscience higher than my custom.

"That is a sentiment to which I must take off my hat," said Dandy, gravely raising it, as he followed his companion's slight figure into the street.

Di looked up at him with laughter in her eyes. "Did you ever know such a humbug?"

"Yes—hundreds."

"His custom was his first thought really."

"Naturally—so he concealed it by a second, or third."

"Did he imagine that he had taken us in?"

"He took himself in, which added to his comfort."

"I could never do that," with decision, as she stopped before the next doorway.

"No? You probably do it twenty times a day. If we didn't humbug ourselves, we should all go melancholy mad. But what's this?" pointing to a poster a few feet to the right above his head.

"Vote for Strangways and School Board."

"Voluntary Schools—a High Church fad."

"Fair-play for all."

"Oh, tear it down!" cried Di indignantly.

"If I can only reach it. Ah, happy thought—the very thing," as he caught hold of a barrel outside a shop, and mounted on its top. With the aid of his stick he loosened the placard from the wall, and tore it straight across. They were both so engrossed that they never noticed that their actions were being observed by a knot of men outside the "Spotted Dog," till a brick whizzed over Di Witherington's hat, and struck the wall only a few inches from Lord Raymond's head. He turned round, with his stick clenched tight in his hand, ready to fight any number of roughs, if he had not been fatally handicapped by the girl whom he had promised to take care of. "I owe you one for that, and I always pay my debts," he called out fiercely, but the next moment, he jumped down from his exalted

position, and, turning to Di, said in his quietest manner, "Hadn't we better go after Mrs. Somebody's tea?"

"Yes, let us go to Mrs. Abinger's," looking up at him with bright undaunted eyes.

But it was much easier to say "Let us go" than to put the proposition into action, for the way was completely blocked by a rough and half-drunken crowd, who shouted hoarsely, "Strangways for ever." "Vote for the School Board." "Down with the —— parsons," having been paid to do it with the money they had just been "liquefying" at the "Spotted Dog." Dandy's blood was up, and he longed to try how many heads he could break before his stick would give way; but he knew that the only chance to keep Miss Witherington, at least, from being hustled and insulted, was to behave more like a lamb than a pugnacious dog.

"Make way for a lady," he said, like the haughtiest Penrose of his line; but the seal-skin collar to his great coat, and his aristo-

cratic air, were too much for Thomas Sykes, the most advanced Radical in Dainton, who did not care how many good things he had himself, but objected, on principle, to seeing them in the possession of others.

"We doan't want any bloated swells to come and h'interfere with us country-folk. If yer bring yer sweetheart into th' mess, you may git her oot th' best you can," he ended with a chuckle, which elicited a roar of laughter from his mates. But Thomas Sykes had mistaken his customer. Dandy saw that Di's cheeks were scorched as if with a flame, and forgetting everything but the necessity of avenging a girl's blush, he hit out straight from the shoulder, preferring at the moment to trust to his own strength to that of his stick. Down went Sykes like a dead bullock; but up went a dozen grimy fists. There was a confusion of many tongues laden with coarse oaths and vulgar expletives, which made Di cower with shrinking ears against the wall, whilst Lord Raymond stood in front of her

with uplifted stick, cursing his own folly in having brought this mob upon her, and casting quick glances in every direction in the vain hope of finding some mode of egress for her. But egress there was none. The doorway, from which they had strayed to pull down the poster, was hopelessly blocked, and not a single policeman was in sight.

"Giv' it 'im," shouted some in the background, with the readiness of those out of reach. "Let 'im 'ave it 'ot an' 'eavy. Crack his d—d skull for 'im, same as 'e did for Tom."

"Look here, my men, listen to common-sense," Lord Raymond began in a tone of quiet remonstrance. "If I've pulled down your poster, go and pull down ours, but if you are decent Englishmen, let this lady go home!"

But they were in no mood for reasoning, and far beyond the reach of argument. The torn paper was dangling before their eyes; their injured mate was adjuring them to give

it to the swell, from the lamp-post to which he was clinging, his language as filthy as his bruised face; their brains were dazed with frequent potations. Those behind urged on those in front—closer and closer they pressed—till their hot, beery breath poured into Dandy's disgusted face, and Di was nearly crushed against the wall behind him.

"Keep up your pluck," he whispered over his shoulder with a re-assuring smile, "Somebody will help us soon."

His expression quickly changed, as down came his stick on the arm of a navvy, who had stretched it out to seize his hat. The rough howled with rage, and threw himself upon him, muttering that he would tear the coat from his back; but, just as Di uttered a cry for "help," and Penrose was struggling hard to keep the fellow off with his knuckles dug into his hairy throat, Montague, Vivian, and Newcome, came down the street on their way to the committee-room; and Jack, catching sight of Penrose, and guessing at his com-

panion, from the well-known red feather in her hat, dashed into the crowd like a madman. He struck right and left with his thick stick, with no respect for any substance that came in his way, till he had forced himself through to Dandy's side. His face was stern as death. After one quick glance at the girl behind him, he turned it on the mob, but they scarcely waited to look at it. Directly they were met by a vigorous resistance, the bullies slunk off, principally out of a care for their own precious skins, partly shamed, in a few cases, by Vivian's stern rebuke, until the rescued and the rescuers were left in undisturbed possession of the pavement.

"Come along," said Jack briefly, and Di came. Her lips were trembling, her legs unsteady, her heart was still beating fast enough for two; but she walked down Wellington Row, in a state of strange exultation, whilst Penrose was desiring a newly-arrived policeman to "lock up that brute by the lamp-post," and explaining the origin of the row to the two clerics.

CHAPTER VI.

“THE BEST FUN IN THE WORLD.”

A SMALL party gathered round the tea-table in Mrs. Abinger's best parlour. It was a pleasant, low-ceilinged room, with crimson moreen curtains to the shuttered window, and a bright fire blazing in the old-fashioned, capacious grate. Mr. Abinger looked as if he were a mere bundle of nerves, with a straggling iron-grey beard attached; whilst his wife was plump and placid, with a face as broad as it was long, and a smile of welcome for all who knocked at her door. She made Miss Witherington sit down by the black japanned tea-tray, and provided her with a cup of tea, whilst Lord Raymond became quite eloquent about her marvellous pluck,

and took every opportunity that presented itself of paying her any attention with bread-and-butter and cake. The other canvassers dropped in, amongst them Philip and Flora, who had extraordinary experiences to recount, whilst they drank their steaming tea, and declared they were half dead with the cold. They both looked quite frightened when told of Di's adventure, but she laughed it off, and Dandy said, "it was a good thing that it had happened, for Miss Witherington might never have another opportunity of proving herself a heroine."

"Or Montague a hero," cried Phil, looking at his friend with admiring eyes.

"I did nothing," said Jack, over his shoulder; and then he returned to his discussion of plans with the Vicar, as if he had no interest in the chatter round the tea-table.

"No one could have done more than Lord Raymond." Di threw out the remark like a challenge. "He kept them all at bay, and

nearly reduced me to a jelly in the process. I shall never forget it."

"It's a flattening reminiscence," Dandy said, quietly; "but I'm glad I annihilated that poster."

"If you had been alone"—began Montague gruffly, unable to keep his anger to himself.

"There would have been a few more black eyes in Dainton," he rejoined with imperturbable good humour; "but if Miss Witherington will trust herself to me again, I promise to be as steady as his reverence, himself," with a bow to Vivian.

"Of course I will, whenever you will come," she said eagerly. "We have scarcely done anything this afternoon."

"If you had followed my advice"—began Montague again, with profound gravity, as the Vicar turned to speak to somebody else.

"But that's what you can't expect of me," she interrupted quickly; "advice is such an awkward pill to swallow."

He remembered a time when she never choked over a pill of that kind when he prepared it for her ; but he retired into silence, knowing that he was bound in honour not to revive the ghost of his past influence, by a single effort on his own part. To be in the same room with her, and to keep outside the bounds of friendly inter-communication, was intolerable to him ; and yet, to leave the house so long as it was brightened by her presence, seemed equally impossible. He had positively hungered for a sight of her face, or the sound of her voice ; now both were granted to him, and, to judge by his expression, he was in a state of the acutest misery. He never addressed another word to her, and never seemed to let his eyes stray in her direction ; yet he knew every sentence she uttered, and even the look that accompanied it. It made him mad to see the smiles that used to be his property given to a man who would try his best to fascinate her, and then go away and forget her. What an insult to the prettiest

girl in Blankshire—the sweetest and best in the world!

"Jack, don't you think we ought to have some more posters?" Phil asked eagerly. "The other side have quite cut us out."

"All right. Think of something spicy"—abstractedly.

"They ought to have plenty of pepper in them, but, bother it, I can't think of anything to say. If it were only about foot-ball, I could write *yards*," as he drew his fair eyebrows together with the important frown of a statesman.

"Then, thank goodness, it isn't. Vivian, what do you say to this, 'Fight for your Faith, and vote for the Voluntary Schools?'"

"If we said anything about fighting, in the next row we should be made responsible for every broken head," he answered with a grave smile.

"Well, then, 'Stand up for your faith.' No one could object to that:

"Don't be a bad son to your mother Church,
Don't be a coward, and desert the ranks,
Don't give up old friends for new,
Don't lie down for the atheists to walk over you."

"Yes, yes, that will do very well," hurriedly.

"Vote for Vivian and Voluntary Schools. Vote against Strangways, and all the stratagems of the devil."

"Not for the world. Don't let us, for God's sake, introduce any bitterness into the struggle."

"The bitterness is there, and you can't help it."

"The whole place is overflowing with it. Did you see that knot of men at the corner? They were the factory hands, grumbling, as, poor fellows, they must grumble, over the last reduction of pay."

"He will drive them to desperation, and then he had better look out. But I must be off," pulling out his watch.

"Are you going to see Miss Witherington home?" The Vicar asked the question as the most natural thing in the world; but he saw in a moment that he had trodden on a sensitive toe.

"Penrose has that honour," said Jack, stiffly, as he buttoned up his coat. "Isn't

Strangeways playing our game for us by spreading discontent amongst his men?"

Vivian shook his head. "They would not dare to go against him."

"Oh! but, Mr. Vivian, indeed I mean them to." A clear, fresh voice broke into the discussion, and Montague turned his face half an inch in the speaker's direction. "I should like to see Mike Crutchley, or Joe Smith, dare to go against *you*. Let us go and talk to them, at once." She thanked Mrs. Abinger prettily for her delicious tea, and with a comprehensive bow to the rest, walked towards the door, followed by Lord Raymond carrying her furs.

He opened it for her, and then handed her the boa, which she wrapped twice round her slender neck, and stood, as if lost in thought, looking at a crooked lamp-post through a mist of tiny snow-flakes.

"We had better hurry up, or Mrs. Witherington will have an attack of 'nerves,'" suggested Dandy.

“Yes, we must lose no time.” All the glad alacrity had gone out of voice and step, as Di moved slowly down the narrow path of the bit of ground which did courtesy for a garden. At the gate she turned, and looked back through the open door with wistful eyes full of troubled questioning, into the lighted room they had just left. The snow-flakes fell on her sables, and turned them into a white Elizabethan ruff; the cold east wind made a plaything of a child’s crownless hat, and whirled it away down the street; Lord Raymond’s tall figure was disappearing in the distance. Still she stood there, speculating, as she had often speculated before, on the changeableness of man. Phil popped his fair head out, caught sight of her, to his surprise, and told her not to wait. The door slammed to and shut out the lights, and she walked on obediently, though she had not been waiting for him, saying to herself as she trudged dully through the snow: “What have I done? Why doesn’t he speak to me? Will this go on for ever?”

Dandy suddenly found out that she had dropped behind, and came back to look for her. "There's a knot of men at the corner, so we had better keep together," he said, with more anxiety in his mind than he allowed to appear in his matter of fact tone.

"You needn't be in the least afraid of them. Not a soul would hurt us in Wellington Row," she rejoined confidently.

"I don't want to get you into another row, or my life won't be safe from your devoted friends. Did you see how Montague glared at me?"

"This is Mrs. Crutchley's," evading an answer to his question by a flank movement to the door of No. 1. "Please, don't make me laugh as you did at Figgins."

Mrs. Crutchley was eminently satisfactory, and averred that she could answer for her son as she could for herself. "I've been a reg'lar paragon of illnesses," she said with pride, addressing the stranger, because she thought he ought to know of her celebrated maladies.

"It would take a week, at least, to tell you all I've gone through."

"You must have had a clever doctor," Lord Raymond hazarded.

Mrs. Crutchley gave a contemptuous sniff.

"Prescot ain't oop to much. He was paid to look arter me, so he didn't moind th' job. I likes them as never sends in a bill. The parson read the beautifulest prayer over a poor respectable body like me, and never grudged the Amens, same as if I'd been a duchess. And if Strangways thinks he's a goin' to make a son o' mine wote agen 'im arter that, he's the biggest sawny I've ever comed across. And th' young leddy by yer side," pointing at Di, with a crooked forefinger, "she's been that good ta me, that when she's agoin' to matermonise like the rest of 'em, I'd pawn my best shawl, but I'd giv' her a present."

"You'll never have to pawn it for me," with decision.

"May-be, this fine gen'leman would tell me

quite contrary," with a queer look out of her half-opened eyes at Lord Raymond.

"Pawn it to-morrow," he said solemnly.

A delighted look of intelligence crossed the old woman's lined face. She nodded her head, and said slowly: "Fust one and then t'other, but it's the new friend as cuts oot the' old 'un."

Di fled out into the street, with tingling cheeks and throbbing heart. Even the poor people noticed that Mr Montague had forsaken her, she told herself unreasonably; and pressing the heel of her Balmoral boot deep into the snow, she swore under the cloudy sky, that she would show him that she didn't care a straw, and she would be just as happy as she always was before she ever knew him. A vain oath, ridiculous and yet pathetic in its impossibility; for happiness is a whimsical bird, unfettered by human wills or wishes—the harder it is pursued the faster it will fly away, but unasked and unsought, it nestles in some tranquil bosom, and never stirs until tranquillity itself has fled. Di's poor little heart

was as far from tranquillity as possible, full of feverish unrest, disheartening doubt, and outraged pride. This canvassing business seemed to be the climax, for long ago they had made their plans together, talking over every detail, and arranging how one was to support the other according as his, or her, influence preponderated. Then in fancy they had always been together, now in fact they were always apart.

“How misleading appearances are,” said Lord Raymond, quietly, as if they were out in the cold and darkness simply to talk generalities.

“It’s always the way with common people,” Di said, with the impatience that springs from pain, whether of mind or body. “If two persons of opposite sexes are seen together, they are supposed to be keeping company.”

“In fact, they put ‘one and one’ together, whilst we are content with doing the same by ‘two and two.’ Who contrives to live in this palace?” as his companion stopped in front of

a disreputable hovel, with potato parings and tea-leaves marring the whiteness of the snow, which had done its best to make a broken door-step look respectable.

"A Mrs. Smith, who tries to make up for the shortness of all necessities by the length of her tongue."

"I hope the powerful weapon will be on our side." He hoped it still more when he had had a taste of its eloquence, and he hurried from its owner's presence at such a rate, that Di could hardly keep up with him.

"Dreadful creature," he said with a shudder. "Send her up to Strangways, by all means. She would talk him crazy in five minutes, and turn him into a Voluntary School partisan before he knew where he was. If she were coming to live under my roof, I would give any one leave to cremate me rather than face another day."

"Don't talk of cremation, I hate it," she said, emphatically, as she struggled with the rusty latch of a demoralised gate.

“I love the thought of it,” musingly. “So neat and tidy, so convenient in lockets for all the people that are spoons on you. But this is trifling,” with a rapid change of expression as the door opened.

Whilst Di was wandering from house to house with Penrose, Montague leant against the mantle-piece in Mr. Abinger’s parlour, with a set expression of stern misery on his pale face, his troubled eyes fixed on the fire. Vivian watched him, whilst discussing some business details with the other men; and felt sure that there was some great trouble on his mind, about which he might eat out his heart in bitter silence, but which he was never likely to confide even to a sympathising friend. He remembered his manner when he asked him if he were going to escort Miss Witherington home; and a sudden suspicion crossed his mind, that a shadow had fallen on the love-affair which he and Kindersley had been watching with secret, but most kindly, interest.

There was no sentimentality in Vivian, but with real true feeling, he had an equally real sympathy, and even in the midst of his pressing business, he cast an anxious thought towards the girl who had always seemed to him the incarnation of unsoiled happiness, and the man whose life had been so visibly brightened by his love for her. It would be such a terrible pity if the girl's brightness were dimmed, and the man's sternness deepened by some barrier thrown between them.

Jack roused himself quickly, remembering that he had to get home in time for dinner, and to do many things before he started. He said he would call at Pine, the printer's, and order a heap of posters; and on the polling day, he would place every vehicle he possessed at Vivian's disposal. Then he went off to find his horse, which he had left at "The White Hart." Phil darted out from amongst the group of men who were smoking on the doorstep.

"Seen nothing of you lately, old chap—but

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you are coming to us to-night, aren't you?" he said confidently, as he caught hold of his arm.

"If I let you have Em and Wildgrave—"

"No;" shaking his head. "Both A 1, but not a patch on you."

"I *couldn't* leave my mother," with decision.

"Rot!" in supreme disdain. "You left her for years—not so long ago."

"But I'm never going to do it again."

"Not till next time," with frank incredulity. "Come and have a rubber with the governor. He has gout in his temper, as well as his toe." Some instinct kept the boy, in the midst of his insistence, from mentioning his sister's name.

Jack looked down into his eager face.

"I can't come, Phil, and that's the honest truth," he said earnestly, and then, with a pang of great bitterness, he saw the boy turn away—too proud to ask again, too hurt to utter a reproach.

The two carts had been brought round

whilst they were talking, as well as Trumpeter, and the ostler was finding some difficulty in keeping Montague's hack quiet. He went up to him and patted his neck; and having soothed him with that one caress, put his foot into the stirrup, and threw his leg across his back.

Di's voice was borne to him by the crisp air. "I think canvassing the best fun in the world, and I shall be too awfully sorry when it is over." The words were addressed to Dandy, and seemed to prove to his jealous heart that the Belgravian Butterfly had already filled the place which he had been forced to vacate. He let his horse carry him home at his own pace, but he could not get away from the sound of those words, which were repeated in the ringing clatter of Trumpeter's hoofs, and which assured him that he was no longer missed, or wanted, by Di Witherington.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DAY OF THE POLL.

Excitement reigned supreme in Dainton on the polling day. The members of the rival committees were never known to be still for more than five minutes at a time. At half-past eleven, Philip Witherington and Jack Montague, according to a preconcerted plan, made an imposing entry into the town, each on the box of a break, with blue ribbons flying, and horns blowing, and followed by an odd procession of landaus, T-carts, pony-carts, farm-carts, &c. &c. Jumbo was there in the friskiest of moods, with long streamers from his dainty head, and with his young mistress behind him looking the picture of a bonnie English girl, a blue silk handkerchief folded

inside the high collar of her sealskin jacket, a coquettish bow of the same colour tied on her whip. No one would have guessed that she had a secret, gnawing trouble making havoc of her peace, for she was brave as any Spartan boy who ever figured as the hero of a hackneyed simile. And, at all events, for this one morning she had put dull care away. Lord Raymond had chosen for his vehicle an antiquated farm-cart with a roan horse of elephantine proportions, and Lady Wildgrave looking too utterly bewitching, the gold of her hair, and the fairness of her face set off by her Russian sables, sat perched on a high kitchen chair behind him, ready to seduce Strangways, himself, from his allegiance to the School Board, if he happened to come in her way. Lord Wildgrave, in a bewildered frame of mind, had taken possession of Montague's high dog-cart, willing to show his zeal for a good cause, when the ice had been spoilt by the snow, but not having the slightest idea as to what he was to do when he reached

the town. Vivian had vainly protested that colours were out of place, when it was neither a question of politics nor of favourite candidates; but his youthful partisans had overruled his objections, and he himself was almost inclined to give way, when the other side broke out into yellow fever, and tied up, or tied on, everything with ribbons of a bilious hue. Phil was determined not to be outdone, and he sprang a surprise on the Strangwayites on the eventful morning of the poll, which set the town in a roar of laughter from one end of the long High Street to the other. A sweep named Tim Tussler, whose comical face was well known in Dainton, sat with grave dignity on a cart which was nothing more than a peculiar shaped truck on wheels, hung round with placards of "Vote for the Vicar," "Vote for Faith and Conscience," "Stand up for your Church," "Don't Swallow the Atheist's Pill," &c. &c., printed in scarlet letters on an azure ground. But the crowning point was the donkey, which, at Phil's instigation, had been

painted a brilliant blue from the tip of its tail to the end of its nose, and which its charioteer drove with the pride of a Cæsar. Up and down the street it went with a jangle of bells every time it shook its head, and followed by a crowd of delighted children.

“Did you ever see such tom-foolery?” asked Harding, with an expression of the utmost contempt on his lean sallow face, as he stopped on his way to the committee-room.

“It’s taken the last bit of wind out o’ Strangways’ sails, I’m thinking,” remarked Nat Winter with a grin, as he thrust his hands into the pockets of his new velveteen coat.

Jack Montague, true to his promise, had taken him on as under-keeper, and overridden all remonstrances made by Dodson, with the remark that poachers always made model keepers, being up to all the dodges of their former comrades. Nat, out of gratitude as well as spite, was as keen as a knife on the side of the Voluntary Schools; and though the

question in dispute was about as great an enigma to him as the origin of an amœba, that did not prevent him at all from laying down the law upon it with a great power of conviction, when discussing the subject with some of his old mates at the factory.

“You sang to quite another tune, not so long ago either, when you came a-begging of Mr. Strangways to be taking of you back,” said the foreman grimly. “You’d have been ready to vote for old Nick himself, if the master had seen fit to demean himself so far as to ask you.”

The blood rushed into Nat’s face. “You mean, skin-scraping cur. If I wasn’t good enough for your boss, I’m good enough for the real gen’leman as has taken me into his service,” he broke out angrily; “and let me tell you that your master aint fit to lick the boots of *my* master, no, nor to sit in the same room with him.”

“You hold your infernal tongue, or I’ll set the police after you—you gaol-bird!”

"I've nothing to fear from the bobbies," drawing up his tall form with the pride of his new respectability. "Let *them* shake in their shoes as keeps unlawful hours, and laughs at Parlermentary 'Tatutes.' Ah, ha! That shot druv' home," and Nat chuckled as the foreman slipped back into the committee-room looking rather like a beaten dog, and there was a general laugh at his expense.

"Hooray for the parson!" Up went the shout with the whole strength of Nat's lungs, as he waved his cap in the air, for a large waggon-load of factory-hands was passing at the moment, and the sight of the yellow rosettes at the horses' heads was too much for his composure. "Why, Mike, I wouldn't ha' thought it of you," he yelled out with all his might, so that his voice rose higher than any of the cries for "Strangways and the Board School." Crutchley replied with a grin from ear to ear, but he knew that Harding could see him from a window, so that he prudently refrained from the knowing wink which his

left eye was itching to give. Next came the Greytowers break, with a team of four ill-matched horses, and a coachman in a gorgeous livery of blue and orange, which made him look like a parrot on an unaccustomed perch. He handled the ribbons as if he were afraid of his horses, and when a burst of cheering greeted him from the yellow committee-room, and made them rather restive, he grew purple all over his puffy face, and swore with an energy and emphasis that would have been useful in another direction. Just when he was getting into serious difficulties with his team, the sweep came by with a jangle of bells which only increased them; but Tim Tussler, instead of getting out of the way as fast as he could, checked his blue donkey in full career, and, standing up, made an elaborate bow to the Greytowers coachman, calling out in a squeaky voice, "Not very comfy up there? Change hosses? Lend you my beauty for a leader?" The indignant coachman made a savage cut at him with his heavy whip,

whilst the crowd roared with laughter. Tim ducked his head just in time, called out 'Ta ta! Going to the poll? Don't ye wish ye may git there?' and, with a defiant wave of his be-ribboned stick towards the angry face above him, he departed, shouting out with the importance of a newly-elected mayor, "Make way there. Make way for the Vicar and the Church," as if he had the two Archbishops and the whole establishment behind him. Peals of laughter followed him down the street; but public attention was soon diverted from him by the imminent danger of a serious accident. Jack Montague was just driving by with a carriageful, when he saw the way was entirely blocked by the Greytowers team. Pratt, the coachman, had lost all control over the leaders, who were kicking and plunging, and backing upon the wheelers. Jack saw at a glance that the situation was serious. He gave the reins to the man sitting next him, and told him to remain where he was. Then he jumped down,

mounted to the box of Strangways' break, and, before the astonished coachman recognised who he was, he had taken the ribbons from his incompetent hands, seized the whip, and begun to administer a severe flogging to the refractory leaders.

"Oh, for mercy's sake! You'll have us all over," Pratt exclaimed, in abject terror.

"Not a bit of it," said Jack between his teeth, to a chorus of screams from excited women and children. "Now, where do you want to go?"

"To the polling place," the coachman answered as in duty bound, though his own frightened heart said "home" as plainly as possible.

"You should never have come out without a second man, now then?" He started them off, holding in the wheelers with a tight hand, so as to throw most of the work on the leaders. The horses recognised the firm handling of a driver who understood them, and meant to manage them, and went down the

street at a swinging pace. The townspeople turned round to stare, and Mr. Figgins remarked to his next-door neighbour, a linen draper, "Starvation is too slow a process for Strangways. He wants to kill off his men by spifflicating of their necks."

"But, look there, if it aint Mr. Montague on the box!" exclaimed his friend with wide-open eyes. "Now I believe that's a dodge of the other side. He won't let them out, trust him for that, till every man Jack of them has promised to vote for the Vicar."

"And if he don't, I admire him for't," said Mr. Figgins candidly. "I wouldn't give a ha'porth of figs for a friend who wouldn't stretch a point to oblige me."

The draper chuckled, having no decided opinions on either side. "Well, leastways, they'll make short work with Strangways' votes at this rate, for no man wants his own neck broken, whatever he may do by his neighbours. But I must be off to the poll."

"Well, Mr. Cooke, I can only tell you that

the aristocracy and the gentry are on the Vicar's side."

"Then it's a very safe side to go on," returned Mr. Cooke, with a knowing look.

"When custom and conscience are in the same box——"

"Why, we know what to do, don't we? Come along with me."

"I don't mind if I do," said Mr. Figgins, buttoning up his coat. "I think it's right to show these people of Dainton that the leading tradesmen of the place know how to set them an example." And with a vast amount of self-satisfaction, the worthy grocer started to record his vote.

When Montague had brought his cargo in safety to their destination, he surrendered the reins to Pratt, and, turning round to the men behind him, said with a smile :

"Now, gentlemen, I suppose you are all aware that I've saved your lives. You owe me one for that, and you won't be so shabby as to deny it."

“We won’t, sir.” “We are truly thankful.”
“My missus would thank you, if she knowed it,” &c. &c.

“Well then, you know how to thank me,”
pointing to the door of the polling-place.
“Vote for your faith, and don’t be a pack
of cowards.”

A blank look of dismay crossed Pratt’s face, whilst an uneasy grin passed from man to man, and they tumbled out of the break as if they were in a mighty hurry to get away. Inside sat Vivian, looking calm and pale, and Harding, fussy, flushed, and important; whilst a red-faced man studied the rate-book, and pounced upon any voter who was behind-hand with his rates. To Vivian, the seven hours during which the poll was open seemed twice the length of any ordinary day. His hopes went up and down in feverish uncertainty, and his outward composure was only a triumph of self-control. The only minutes of peace he knew were those which he spent at evensong. There was a big luncheon at “The

White Hart," to which Montague dragged him almost by main force ; but he added little to the general entertainment, as his mind was burthened with such heavy anxiety. There was a great deal of laughter amongst the young people, and Lord Raymond, though talking very quietly, seemed to be particularly amusing both to Lady Wildgrave and Di Witherington, whilst Montague sat at the other end of the table, between Newcome and Benson, and scarcely uttered a word. He got up very soon, and said he must slip away, as he had promised to take Vivian's place. Lord Wildgrave called out something in chaff about his "vicarious" proclivities, Em begged him to wait a minute, whilst Di went on talking to her neighbour, and seemed deeply interested in anything and everything but Mr. Montague.

Vivian met her again, as they both came out of the little church by the river. There had been a lull in the excitement of the day, for when the poll is not opened till mid-day,

the greatest rush of voters is sure to be in the dinner-hour or towards the evening, and in the middle of the afternoon there is generally a breathing space for those who are bringing them in.

"I wish you would go home and rest," he said earnestly. "The Colonel will put all the blame on my shoulders, if you are worn out."

"But I shan't be worn out, and I couldn't rest till I knew. The Wildgraves have gone home, but Flo and Mr. Kindersley are somewhere about, so I shall be all right."

"You won't go home alone? There may be a row."

"I shan't be alone. Lord Raymond has promised to take care of me."

"Don't think me impertinent," he said gently, feeling obliged to speak, because of the deep interest he had in both of them, "but isn't Jack Montague an older friend?"

"The oldest friend need not be half such a good one as the newest," she said hurriedly, as she drew her boa closer round her white

throat. "But can you tell me which street I had better try next?"

"I really don't know, my kind friends have taken all that work out of my hands," feeling as if he had received a rebuff.

Di immediately plunged into an account of a hugely fat woman who had nearly broken the springs of her pet cart. He listened courteously, but did not laugh as she had meant him to. When they parted at the door of "The White Hart," he looked down into her pretty face with a peculiarly kindly smile; but he said nothing, and strode off, as if he were thinking of nothing but getting to the polling-place.

There were two polls in different streets, and one of the curates or Montague was always in Wych Street, whilst Vivian, or some friend of his, was always at the other in High Street. It was very tedious work for all of them, but sometimes there were amusing interludes, as for instance, when the dainty little Viscountess led in a party of rough men, and was audibly

instructing them as to the spelling of the word "against" which they had to write on their ballot-papers. Harding grew crimson, and started up on the point of interfering, but the remonstrance stuck in his throat, when she gave him one of her winning smiles, and asked after Mr. Strangways, as if she were deeply interested in his health. All his bounce went out of him, as he said gruffly : "Down with the influenza, m' lady, or else he'd have been here to check these goings on."

"Pray tell him how sorry we are, and how we have missed him," she said sweetly, with a mischievous twinkle in her blue eyes ; and then she gave Vivian a little nod, and went back in high spirits to Dandy and the farm-cart.

"We had been wondering what had become of the old Bear," she said, as she took her seat on the kitchen chair "and would you believe it, influenza has got him in its grip? I never admired the disease before!"

The long day came to an end at last, and night settled down on the excited town. The

stars shone out with the brightness of a cloudless frost, and there was a cold, crisp air, but the biting wind had gone to rest, tired perhaps of adding another worry to the harassed day. Not a breath stirred the snow from the whitened roofs, which stood out in all their primal whiteness against the dark blue sky; whilst that in the streets had been smirched and blackened by the tread of many feet, as innocence is spoilt and soiled by the rough contact with the world. The shadows were densely, darkly black, the shops all shut, their closed fronts looking like the heavy lids of blind eyes; but every public-house and gin-palace was ablaze with gas, and the light streamed out into the cold streets whenever the swing-doors were opened. The counting took a long time, and was very trying to harassed nerves. No one could tell for certain what the result would be, but the odds were decidedly in favour of a School Board from the amount of labour employed by its principal advocate.

"Keep up your pluck," whispered Kindersley, as he laid his hand on Vivian's shoulder. "I shouldn't be at all surprised if we pulled through."

"All things are possible, I know," he said in a tired voice; "but God may think it best to lay this yoke upon us. We can't tell."

"And if we fail, that will be our greatest comfort. But see, here they come!"

At that moment, Mr. Newcome and Jack came in, looking triumphant, followed by some officials. "We are all right at Wych Street," they said both at once. "And how are you going here?"

"We don't know yet," and Vivian grasped the back of a chair, as he turned his white face towards the urns.

"Three thousand four hundred and sixty-one for the School Board; four thousand five hundred and seventy against it," announced the clerk in a formal voice a few minutes later.

Jack rushed to the door, and threw it wide

open. "Victory for the Church," he shouted. "Three cheers for Mr. Vivian. Majority of 1119."

"Hurrah!" Up went hats, caps, hands and voices. A mighty cheer rang out waking the echoes over all the frost-bound town, a joyous peal came from the old grey tower of St. Mary's, signalling the victory of religion over secularity, and a silent, fervent thanksgiving went up to heaven from hearts that had waited in prayerful hope.

Harding and all his crew slipped away from the general buzz of congratulation, but not so fast as to prevent them from casting sharp glances at the mass of people, in order to detect any of the factory-hands, who might be amongst the cheering crowd.

There was a great hand shaking amongst excited clerics and enthusiastic partisans, and Mr. Hurley, who had produced his five pounds so magnanimously at the meeting, declared he would have given another gladly to buy this success.

Then Dandy put Miss Witherington into her little cart, and Kindersley looked after his daughter, who had had a small tiff with Phil, and Vivian took him and Montague home to a cheerful supper at the clergy-house. The crowd melted away like butter in the sun, and sad to say, Joe Smith and several of his mates celebrated the Church's victory in bumpers of "cold without," and felt as if the earth were quaking, when they took their uncertain way homewards at midnight.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RECTOR AND VICAR STAND TO THEIR GUNS.

THE canvassing had been one long harassing worry, and Montague said he was thankful that it was over ; but life felt uncommonly flat to him, when he had no longer to persuade the ratepayers of Dainton to do their duty. Day after day he had looked forward, both with pain and pleasure, to the thought of meeting Di Witherington ; but when the meeting actually came off, the pain was sure to swallow up the pleasure, as the lobster gobbled up the turtle, instead of reserving himself for sauce, when they were both being brought home for somebody else's dinner, in the old story. Once his heart gave a jump,

because her face wore the same old look of delight as it used to when she caught sight of him; but when he came up to her, with every pulse throbbing, she received him like a casual acquaintance, and turned the next moment with vivid interest to listen to some trivial remark of Dandy's. It did seem a curious dispensation of Providence, that he should have to stand by and see her drift into what he, rightly or wrongly, considered a dangerous haven, without being able to hold up a finger to prevent it. Penrose, the Belgravian Butterfly, would admire her beauty and brightness, but he would have no knowledge of the depths of her nature; and she could not fail to feel this want in him, however she might grow to love him. Their union could never be a happy one, of that he was as sure, as that Prospero was out and out the best hunter in the West-Blankshire Hunt; but he was certain that it would come off sooner or later, for the attraction already was mutual, and he thought that Dandy would

probably be glad to be weaned from his flirtation with Em. He gave a heavy, impatient sigh as he thought of all these unpleasant things, and thereby roused the attention of his mother.

"I want you to promise me one thing, Jack," she said in her gentle voice, out of which all the briskness had gone since her last illness.

"Anything you like, mother—if I can."

"It's selfish of me, perhaps; but I do want you to tell me that you will never leave me as you did before," dropping her knitting on her knee, and looking into his grave face with a tender entreaty in her eyes.

He shook the ashes from his pipe. "Why do you ask me this? Did you think I was going to give you the slip?"

"I thought you were getting tired of your home."

"Not the least bit, mother."

"You don't seem to care about some of your neighbours as you used to," in a low

voice, as she picked up her stitches with unsteady fingers, for she felt as if she were treading on dangerous ground.

“Quite a mistake. I like them better than ever, except Strangways, whom I detested from the first.”

Mrs. Montague sighed gently. It was so hard to have an only son living under the same roof, and yet in reality as far apart as the two poles, all because of a secret trouble which he *would* keep to himself. She longed to tell him that, whatever it was, she would not think the worse of him; that a mother's love would last through good report and ill; that nothing made her so unhappy as to be kept outside of his heart and mind. But she was a wise woman; she kept it all back, and only asked him again never to leave her. “I couldn't bear to die, and never say “good-bye.” There was a quiver in her voice and a tremble about her lips as she said it, for her heart was very full, and she thought that her end was not so very far off, and Jack was

inexpressibly touched. He came over to her, and knelt by her side. "It won't be good-bye for a great many years" he said, with a break in his voice; "but I'll never desert you again. I'm not much of a companion for you; but I suppose I'm better than nobody."

"Better than anybody," she whispered, as she kissed his bright brown hair, "My own dear boy." Then she looked long into his grave face—the handsomest in England to her partial eyes—and studied the lines on his broad white forehead and about his sensitive mouth, which told of trouble and care. "I wish I could see you as happy as Em," she said, never having known the real truth about the Wildgraves' household.

Jack smiled grimly. "Don't think their sort of happiness is in my line."

"Oh, be happy in your own way, only be your own bright self. You used to make me rather uneasy because you seemed a little thoughtless," with a smile, "and now you think too much."

"A man has more to think about than a boy. And besides, I was such an empty-headed chap—cricket, tennis, dancing, hunting—that was my idea of life. I can't go back to that," as he got up from his knees, and walked to the window, "for I feel about a hundred years old."

"But why do you feel so?" The words escaped her involuntarily, and she almost trembled as she waited for the answer.

"Ah, why indeed? That sort of thing comes upon you like the influenza upon Strangways on the polling-day. I hear that Harding had been spying out the men who voted against him, and he has given the sack to three hundred. Fearful shame, isn't it?"

"But how could he find out?" she asked, with ready tact following his lead, though feeling as if a door had suddenly been shut between them.

"Our majority had to be explained somehow, and a few of the men boasted of the trick they had played Strangways when they

scarcely knew what they were saying. The worst of it is that their wives and little brats always pay for their folly."

Jack thought very tenderly of his mother, as he went up to The Wilderness that afternoon to inquire after the Colonel, who almost as soon as the weather broke, after the long frost, had a nasty fall out hunting. He could not disguise from himself the unpleasant fact, that his mother had never recovered her strength since the last illness, that her handsome, kindly face wore an appearance of great delicacy, and that her step, instead of being unusually brisk and active for her age, was almost like the uncertain lagging tread of an old woman. She was the tie which bound him to Derwent's Cray, when he would rather have been in the furthest corner of the world; but he could not endure the thought that the tie might be broken before many years had come and gone. He told himself, again and again, that she was the only person who cared a button for him, the only person to

whom his existence or non-existence would be an important fact; and that when she was taken from him, he would feel as if he were utterly alone in a crowded world. She had behaved so splendidly during all this miserable time, never boring him as so many other women would have done with inopportune questions, but allowing him to go his own way—content to love and trust, and wait. “’Pon my soul she’s the best woman that ever breathed,” he wound up enthusiastically, as he stopped at the Witherington’s door; but she was put out of his head two minutes later, when he was ushered into the library, and found Di sitting by her father’s side with a book on her lap, and the last rays of the setting sun lighting up her gold-brown hair and fair sensitive face with an aureole of glory. For a moment his self-possession forsook him, and he could scarcely behave coherently; till, as through a maze, he heard her voice, clear, cold, and unimpressioned, saying “So glad you have come, Mr. Montague, for you will take

care of my father whilst I go out." Then with a slight bend of a very haughty head, she walked out of the room, taking the sunshine with her, and Jack was left to be as sympathetic and cheerful as he could to the Colonel. Outside the heavy door she stopped in the semi-darkness of the passage, and stamped her foot angrily on the thick soundless matting. "Oh, what an utter fool I am to care!" she muttered with a half-sob, as the tears stood in her indignant eyes. "I hate him, and I always shall!"

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There is no possibility of denying that Cyril Vivian was a man who never allowed his friends' energies to rest. As soon as the School Board business was satisfactorily settled, he began to think of enlarging his schools, and the next question was how to provide the necessary five hundred pounds. The ugliest woman in Dainton, who was also the fattest, said that if any one liked to get up some

tableaux vivants, and would take all the trouble off her hands, she would be willing to undertake the part of Mary Stuart. A Mr. Stimpson, who was understood to be clever, possibly because he wore green spectacles, and had no thoughts to spare for his dress, offered to give a lecture in the Town Hall on the peculiar habits of the Megatherium. A Mr. Quintus Jones proposed to start a penny subscription, which, counting the population as thirty-six thousand, might be expected to bring in one hundred-and-fifty pounds; and in a fit of generosity he even offered to head the list. Then Flora Kindersley lifted up her soft voice, and suggested a Lumber Sale. This was at once so popular a suggestion that every one present claimed it as his, or her own idea. It was decided unanimously that it should be a Rag Fair on a most pretentious scale, with plenty of bunting and music. The refreshment stall would be furnished by voluntary contributions from the bakers and confectioners, dramatic

performances would entertain the frivolous, whilst the more practical people were securing the most wonderful bargains, and in order to arouse no jealousy in the ladies of the town and neighbourhood, by making an invidious selection of one of their number to open the sale, Lady Wildgrave should be invited to perform the ceremony. These preliminaries were settled after long deliberation, and then the members of the committee adjourned to their different homes, in order to cast speculating glances on their tables and chairs, their gowns, coats or hats, to see if they could be degraded into lumber. All went well. The Viscountess accepted the invitation, and expressed herself deeply gratified by the honour conferred on her. People were so anxious to divest themselves of their rubbish, that there seemed to be some risk of the hall being piled from the floor to the painted rafters. Even the miser of the town sent two empty gallipots, and a broken razor; and Mr. Figgins, who wished to pose as a generous patron of the Church

Schools, forwarded a mouldy ham. The date fixed was the ninth of April, and the committee met on the seventh to decide what routes the different carts were to take, and which houses they were to call at. Miss Kindersley arrived with dismay written in large characters across her small face, and produced a telegram just received by Mr. Montague to the effect that Lady Wildgrave was laid up with the influenza, but that the Viscount would be happy to act as her substitute, if wanted. The elder ladies looked properly distressed, but those who belonged to the younger and more frivolous detachment, found abundant consolation in the latter clause of the despatch. To many of them, a man of any sort or description, was preferable to a woman, and a good-looking agreeable Viscount was a windfall that they could all appreciate. Therefore their faces brightened rather than clouded, and a few decided on the spur of the moment to don their best frocks for the occasion—in spite of the threatened

dust and dirt from the hoarded lumber of years. But alas for their hopes, another meeting was being held at the same time in the Rector of Derwent's Cray's private sanctum, a small and informal meeting, consisting of Montague, Vivian, and Kindersley himself, and by two out of the three the telegram had been received in an adverse spirit.

Kindersley looked at Vivian, who shook his head gravely.

"I am very sorry to hear of your sister's illness," the Rector began sympathetically, "and I hope she will take care not to get a chill. That is the chief danger, I believe, in influenza."

"She won't take a bit of care, if I know her; but she's a lucky little thing, and I daresay she will pull through all right," said Jack, with a fair amount of fraternal philosophy. "Shall I tell Wildgrave you will be glad to have him?"

"I don't think we need trouble your brother-in-law," very gravely.

"He never goes in for anything but amusing himself, so I wouldn't grudge him this small bit of trouble. If you want him, pray have him," as if he had the entire disposal of the Viscount's tiny person.

"To tell you the truth, we find ourselves in a difficult position. No one knows your brother-in-law better than you do, so you can hardly be surprised if we consider it inconsistent to ask such a man to do anything for us," with a smile to soften the effect of his words. "Now, don't be angry, Jack. What would they say in Dainton, if we put forward Lord Wildgrave as one of the supporters of our Church Schools?"

"I don't know, and I don't care," hotly.

"They would say we countenanced immorality when crowned by a paltry coronet, though we denounced it in cottagers and factory-hands."

"Then it would be consummate impudence. What business is it of theirs, or any one else's," looking the Rector straight in the

face, "to pick holes in a man's private character?"

"Look at it from our point of view, and you will see that we are right."

"Your point of view is a very peculiar one."

"Not at all. If you were holding a Teetotaler's Meeting, don't you think it would be rather paradoxical to ask a notorious drunkard to open it?"

"Nobody but a fool would think of doing so."

"Exactly. This Lumber Sale is for the sake of our schools, where we hope to teach the highest morality. I needn't explain any further," with a shrug of his shoulders.

"No, you needn't," the blood rushing to his temples, "and I'm sorry to have exposed Wildgrave to such an insult. I call it plaguey Pharisaicism, not worthy of either of you," and he flung out of the room, afraid of stopping another minute lest he should say too much, for his temper was rising to fever-heat, and his heart giving great passionate throbs.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LUMBER SALE.

LORD RAYMOND PENROSE, having come down to Derwent's Cray to kill an April fox, was sitting before the fire, in Jack's favourite chair, smoking some of his host's excellent tobacco, when the said host burst into the room, more like a freshly released blood-hound than a sane Englishman.

He cast the telegram, which he had crushed into a ball, into the heart of the fire, and watched it burn with angry eyes, whilst Dandy in turn watched him, mentally deciding that he was on the boil, and calculating as to the exact minute when the explosion would begin. He had not long to wait; Jack looked up and met his speculative gaze, and it acted

like a match to a fuse. "Never heard such nonsense! They want a saint to open this Lumber Sale, and every one else is warned off."

"And you proposed Wildgrave?" meditatively, as he shook out his pipe. "The character would fit him like a glove!"

"Pshaw! Half the exhibitions in the world would be shut up, if you had to put the characters of the people who were to open them under a microscope."

"The general public have always got a microscope handy—it is provided for them by the press."

Jack took no notice of this remark. "It was a down-right piece of good-nature on Wildgrave's part—" poking the fire savagely.

"You've got one or two very pretty girls down here—"

"That had nothing to do with it. It was pure good-nature. And then to give him such a slap in the face! I did think Kindersley and Vivian were above that sort of narrow-minded prejudice."

"Narrow-minded?" raising his eye-brows,
"I should say, it was just the reverse."

"How do you mean?"

"We get into a groove, and go with the stream—it's so easy, and saves trouble; on the other hand, it shows a certain breadth of view to shake yourself free and go against it."

"You are the last man I should have expected to talk like that," looking at Penrose in surprise, as he lay back in the comfortable chair in an attitude of satisfied indolence.

"Then you are wrong, I ought to have been the first," staring up at the ceiling.

"I can't see why."

"Because I act so differently. But, look here, Jack; I wouldn't quarrel with the parsons over this," rousing himself with unwonted energy, and sitting upright. "It was a nasty thing to do, but it was their duty. Half the priests in the world would have shirked it."

"Then I wish these were more like the

other fellows," growled Montague, as he poked the fire with the sole of his boot.

"No; you'd be sorry to change. Two such men stand up as finger-posts above the common ruck. It will be our own look-out if we keep our eyes shut as we pass them." Dandy was silent for a minute, as if surprised at his own speech; then he looked up with a half-shy smile, and asked, "Got some more baccy?"

Montague handed him his pouch, in silence, too much astonished at the line he had taken, to answer him at once. If Penrose had risen up, and thrown his pipe in his face, he could not have been more completely taken aback. The door opened, and Vivian was announced. He shook hands with Penrose, and then, turning to Jack, said quietly, "You would like to knock me down; but don't do it, as I can't retaliate."

"No; if brute force could do any good, I should try and pommel some common-sense

into yours and Kindersley's heads. But take a chair," pushing one forward.

"If you have any to spare, I should be glad of it," taking no notice of Montague's unusual rudeness, and dropping into the arm-chair as if he were tired, "I feel my supply running out. But seriously, Montague, the last thing we either of us wish to do is to hurt your feelings."

"Then you've managed a self-denying action," bitterly, as he looked down his nose.

"No, you are too sensible to be offended because we do our simple duty. Am I right in speaking openly before Penrose?"

"Yes, he knows all about it, and he's on your side."

"Indeed! I'm glad to hear it."

Penrose smiled, but did not think it necessary to say anything.

"If your feelings were so strong upon the point," Jack went on, nursing his wrath, "I wonder you let Wildgrave have any hand in the business on the polling-day."

"I never knew he was in Dainton till I saw him at the luncheon."

"And then you actually sat at table with the awful sinner!"

"What am I that I should say to any man, 'You are too great a sinner to sit down with me?' My dear fellow, do be reasonable. You must acknowledge that the apparent decadence of Christianity is entirely owing to the hideous compromises which it is always making with the world. You've said as much yourself."

"I know I have, but I don't see that this is a case in point," smoking with a dogged expression on his face.

"Excuse me, but that is because you won't see it. If the Church holds her standard in an uncertain grasp, who will save it from being trodden in the dust? Not those, who, for the sake of popularity, or for some other sordid reason, smile on all the sinners who happen to belong to the world of fashion."

"What does Dainton know of the world?"

Wildgrave is nothing to them but the husband of my sister," with his head in the air.

"Only the other day, a Daintonite sent me a copy of 'Plain Speaker,' with a paragraph about your brother-in-law in it, which showed up his doings, with an amused sneer; so they are not so much in the dark as you fancy."

"But who cares a hang for 'Plain Speaker'?"

"I do. The society paper which laughs at everything from a creed to a crime, blunts the moral sense of its constant readers. When vice is described in a neat epigram, they chuckle over the wit, and forget to frown at the sin. There is nothing so deadly as this facile laughter, in the place of righteous wrath," knitting his brows together. "The society mother says 'My darling boy is a little too fast.' And then she smiles—and a smile goes round the room, as if it were a vastly amusing thing that this unfortunate young beggar had plunged into vice before the hair had grown upon his lip."

"You wouldn't have her tear her hair in public?"

"No, but I would have her be more true. Why should she feign an amusement which it would be outrageous of her to feel? How many of us go about, living an actual lie?" Something in Jack's face startled Vivian, and he suddenly found the ground hot under his mental feet. Had this man, whose life was such a paradox, something hidden in his past, which made him feel like a hypocrite, when he seemed to have a higher standard of virtue than some of his neighbours? It was a question of the deepest interest, and as it flashed through his mind, he resolved that sooner or later he would find out the answer. "You, who've knocked about the world," he went on, feeling his way by the light of his psychological instinct, "must have met scores of men who are absolutely ruining their lives by a wretched compromise between their own consciences, and the demands of society."

"Show me the man who hasn't," Montague

rejoined with a short laugh, as he moved to the window—"if he lives in any sort of society, and has any appearances to keep up. We all do it, of course."

"Except Wildgrave and myself, please," put in Penrose. "There's no compromise about us. We do the thing thoroughly, and in the frankest manner possible."

"It is this—frankness," he wished to say 'audacity,' "in Lord Wildgrave—I won't couple you in the same bracket—which places us in such a difficult position."

"Don't see why there should be the smallest fuss," suggested Lord Raymond quietly. "Say that you think the office more suited for a lady, and that you've asked the 'Lovely Goddess.'"

"But we haven't," gruffly from Montague.

"But we can—and, saving your sister," Vivian said with a smile, as he stood up, "we could not have any one more appropriate. I shall never forget what she did for us about the polling."

"Or the horrid beastly weather."

“And the lies we told together,” murmured Dandy poetically, as if tired of being unwontedly serious.

Montague came forward slowly, not having made up his mind as yet to full forgiveness; but when Vivian held out his hand, he took it, and shook it heartily, unable to withstand the irresistible influence of his frank, fearless eyes, and smiling lips. They looked into each other's faces, then Jack turned quickly away, and Vivian went to the door.

“It is the shadow of this horrid ‘something’, mistake, or crime whatever it is, which has come between him and that girl,” he said to himself, as he walked down the drive in the teeth of the bleak east wind. “Two lives to be spoilt by what would possibly turn out to be a quixotic scruple? Not if I know it. I'd give much to drag it out into the daylight, and see what is needed. Confession or expiation—it must be one or the other, and whichever it is, shall be carried out, if I have the smallest influence over him!”

For once in her life, Mrs. Montague was deeply offended with the Rector. It somehow reached her ears, though Jack had made up his mind not to tell her, that he had objected to her son-in-law taking the place of his wife at the opening of the Lumber Sale, on the score of his character. She rose up in her wrath and condemned the two clerics at once, as narrow-minded pharisees; for, like most women, she ceased to be her usual, reasonable self, whenever her affections were concerned. She had always been blind to Wildgrave's faults, and during her last illness, he had ingratiated himself with her still further, by sending her kindly messages by his wife. Also, when the ice was bad, and the weather insupportable, he had often sat with her, and whiled away a pleasant half-hour by amusing, though not elevating, chit-chat. She was therefore indignant at what she considered to be unjustifiable treatment of a most inoffensive man; and she refused to include either Vivian or Kindersley in the dinner-

party which she proposed to give as a proof of her own complete convalescence. This was a sign of extremest displeasure with the Rector, for Mrs. Montague had always thought no party complete without him ; and, during her son's absence, he had invariably been asked to take the place of the master of the house at her table. Living so near, Kindersley could scarcely be unaware of his sudden ostracism from his old friend's hospitable board.

But when Flo exclaimed "How very odd ! A dinner-party at The Priory, and they haven't asked you !" He only said with his genial smile : "They've had me so often that I've become quite stale—Time for somebody new."

"As if anybody could be half so nice as you !" she cried with strict impartiality, as she kissed him where the hair was beginning to leave a large margin of forehead.

"Talking of nice people, I must go and see Strangways. They say he is awfully bitter against his work-people."

“Who is sarcastic now? If the old bear is nice—I hope I’m as nasty as possible.”

He looked down into her pretty, animated face with paternal pride. “Sorry I don’t find you so, my dear!” And then he ordered his horse, and rode off to Greytowers to see if he could soften the quarrel between master and men, without one grain of bitterness in his generous heart against his favourite parishioner, because he knew that she had only been led into her present course of action through the blindness of her affections.

Colonel Witherington was another who took the matter up hotly, and chose to be very sarcastic about it. He ignored Kindersley’s share in it, and threw the whole blame upon Vivian, because the Lumber Sale was his affair alone. He declared that no daughter of his should open the wretched thing, and have her character and disposition exposed to invidious criticism. Moreover he remembered that Di had once flown into a passion, so she had proved herself ineligible for an office which was

only to be given to a saint. He hoped that Vivian had inquired into the character of all the men who drove the carts, and of all the people who had been requested to send lumber! Was he certain about the morals of his own tailor; and did he know that the man who supplied him with his clerical hats was said to have quarrelled with his wife? Vivian bore both good-natured chaff and ill-natured sarcasm, with utter imperturbability. He knew that he had done his duty, and as he felt straight with his own conscience, he cared very little about the verdict of the world.

On the ninth of April, the "Lumber Sale" in aid of the St. Mary's Voluntary Schools opened itself in the most independent manner possible. Before some of the stall-keepers had even reached their different posts, the crowd rushed in and commenced operations, chiefly in clothes, carpets, and curtains. Old fashioned Nottingham lace curtains—abominations of an unæsthetic past—were bought up like the shares in the South-Sea-Bubble, scraps of

carpet—frayed, soiled, and even tattered—were fought over like tooth-some bones by hungry dogs, and gowns that were hideous, faded and uncleanly, were made fruitful occasions for the breakage of the tenth commandment. It was a dusty, noisy, and even riotous scene, and the two girls, Diana and Flora, in their clean, spring frocks, standing amongst the shabby odds and ends of furniture, of which their stall was composed, looked like a poem in a pig-stye. There were certain alleviations to the tedium of the afternoon, for Lord Raymond seated on a three-legged chair, a-top of a diseased table, kept the crowd from bursting over all barriers like an inrushing ocean, and added to the fun by a running fire of chaff; whilst Phil, with a necessary reversal of the usual course of action in a town where girls were plentiful and men scarce, sold yellow roses from The Wilderness conservatory to fair buyers, who bought their “button-holes” eagerly, because of the pleasant smile on the boy’s good-looking face; and Jack Montague

lent a piquancy to the situation by keeping away from the only stall in which his interest was centred, and seeming to be engrossed in the sale of old boots. Now and then his eyes wandered to the corner, where he could see a fair frank face framed in gold brown hair, standing out against a back-ground of dark moreen curtains, ticketed "four-and-sixpence the pair." By-and-bye the curtains came down with a run to three-and-six, and were handed to a customer in green silk gloves, but Di never left her stall till the last of her commodities vanished—at a reduction, when, thinking it must be midnight, she asked Dandy the time, and found it was seven o'clock! When the Hon. Treasurer counted out the monetary result, it was discovered that they reached the satisfactory total of two-hundred and fifty pounds, five shillings and sixpence—but there were other results of which no one took account, and yet which were of graver importance. Every time that Di Witherington and Jack Montague met under

the same roof, the breach widened between them, because it emphasised the fact that he never meant to relax from his policy of avoidance. Every other man, whether friend or acquaintance, came up to the furniture-stall, which was under the charge of the two prettiest girls in the place; and offered to buy the most impossible articles, simply for the pleasure of bargaining with beauty. But Jack kept aloof, sternly holding to what he considered to be his line of duty; and as the long, noisy, stuffy afternoon drew to its close, he felt as if he loathed the chattering crowd with a deadly hatred, and when he took up a pair of heavy boots to hand them to a half tipsy ruffian, he looked so fierce that the man shrank back, thinking they were coming at his head. "And to think she can be content with that fellow's eternal chaff!" he grumbled to himself in futile jealousy of Dandy's untiring attentions, "as if life were as shallow as a trout-stream, and made up of nothing but giggles and jokes!"

“Wonderfully successful, double what we expected to get,” Di said, in answer to her mother’s inquiries, as she threw her hat on to a sofa, and herself into a chair, “but if you ever catch me at another, you may send me straight to Bedlam,” which scarcely sounded as if “giggles and jokes” were an all satisfying diet either for her heart or soul.

CHAPTER X.

PETER STRANGWAYS MAKES A MOVE.

PETER STRANGWAYS rose up from his influenza, and shook himself; in other words he surveyed the situation with a critical eye, and pondered over his future course of action. His first move was to discharge the men, who had voted against him, and thus to prove himself complete master of their lives. This was easily done. Spies informed against them, and Mike Crutchley, Joe Smith, and two hundred and ninety-eight of their mates, found themselves in the streets of Dainton with nothing to do, and with very little prospect of anything to do in the hungry future. Then Strangways chuckled, for he knew that they had found out his power. They might have

filled their places in his factory to perfection, but if thrown out of their own particular niches, it was impossible for them to set up for themselves. The work of one boot is divided between clickers, pressmen, fitters, machinists, riveters or lasters, sewers, and finishers, from whose labour the perfect boot evolves, but not one of the men or women thus engaged day after day, and year by year, could make a boot, alone. Their only chance was to migrate into another country, and this was very precarious work, for the clicker might find there was only a vacancy for the machinist, or the sewer discover that only finishers were in demand. They resolved therefore to stay on in Dainton, hoping that if fresh orders happened to drop in, Strangways would be obliged to put his pride in his pocket, and allow them to come back. They might almost as well have expected him to keep open-house for them at Greytowers; but meanwhile, this state of expectation was better than despair, and many of the finishers, especially,

found relaxation in the amusements of boxing and pigeon flying, whilst the public-houses were thronged, and their homes more cheerless than ever.

Everything was going well, according to Strangways' views, for want of work brought pinch of poverty, and the men who had contrived to "sell" him, were "sold" in their turn. It gave him positive pleasure to drive through the town, and see knots of his formerly busy workmen idling about the streets, half drunk and more than half demoralised, by the bitterness of discontent united with enforced inaction. He noted with vindictive satisfaction that, one by one, warm coats went to the slop-shop, and their former owners shivered in light clothing during the long cold spring. As he sat beside his blazing fire, he gloated over the thought of the many empty grates in Wellington Row and Stanley Lane; and if any of the wives of the discarded hands ventured to beg for so much as a sack of coals, he told them with a

grin to go to Mr. Vivian, he was the man for them—and he told himself that he had scored all round. But not *all round*—there was the mistake. In these days, when it is the fashion to take the socialistic propaganda for the gospel of the nineteenth century, it is no longer the habit of the classes to overlook the sorrows of the masses; and those who had more than the average share of the comforts of life were fiercely indignant on behalf of the others, who never had but few, and from whom those few had been ungenerously taken. Voting by ballot had been introduced, they said, for the express purpose of allowing men to vote according to their own will or conscience, without being subjected to persecution for so doing. These discarded factory-hands had simply done what the laws of the land enjoined them to do; and Strangways was flying in the face of all principles of equity by punishing them for their independent conduct. This was what all the people of the neighbourhood were saying to each other whenever they came together;

so that the master of Greytowers met with a chilling reception from most of his neighbours, when he paid his first round of calls. He had expected that all would be vying with each other in the effort to smooth him down after his great disappointment; but instead of this, the Witheringtons were less friendly than they had ever been before, Mrs. Montague and her son obtrusively cold and distant, whilst the Kindersleys made not the slightest pretence of hiding their frank disapproval. He went home a wiser, though a worse-tempered man. Pratt came in for a large amount of abuse for the way in which he handled his horses, which he possibly deserved, but which his master, who never had driven anything nobler than a donkey, only gave him because he must vent the store of bad temper, which he had accumulated during the course of his visits, on somebody who was incapable of retaliation. After throwing off some of his steam, he retired to his so-called "study," where no book except an account book was ever opened, but

where he could study his wrongs without interruption, with the help of some brandy and water. A self-made man is generally particularly anxious to stand well with society, and Peter Strangways was no exception to the rule. What was the good of Sheraton chairs and tables, of carved panels and gilded cornices, of carpets from the Paris exhibition, and curtains from Eastern looms, if there were no one to look at them. He had an eye for their value, but none for their beauty ; and he liked to boast of how much he had given for some lovely picture of flowing river and silvery willow by Keeley Halswelle, to a neighbour who, though not rich enough to buy it, had the taste at least to appreciate its merits. He had spent his life in hard work, and now he wished to enjoy its fruits ; but he had made his house so splendid that he no longer felt at home in it, and the only pleasure he could get from it was in the envy, which he hoped to excite in the breasts of his friends and acquaintances. If they held them-

selves aloof, there would be nothing for it but to shut it up and go away. Was there no way of conciliating them? He could not take his men back—that would be owning himself in the wrong; to offer a cheque to Vivian for his schools, would be tantamount to stultifying all that he had said in favour of a School Board; and then, like a sudden illumination, it flashed across his dispirited mind, that a short time ago he had promised Miss Witherington to give a ball. A ball at Greytowers with everything done on a scale of unequalled magnificence, the latest foreign importation by way of band, Heidsieck's champagne flowing as fast as the Derwent, supper ordered at a guinea a head, flowers as plentiful as flies in summer, polished floors to dance on, the gardens ablaze with electric light. "Ah, that is just the sort of thing to fetch 'em," he ejaculated, as he rubbed his hands with delight, "and Miss Di will jump at it, and bring the whole lot of 'em with her."

Peter Strangways, as soon as he had de-

terminated on a line of action, liked to make a start. He wrote to his sister, Miss Louisa Strangways, an old maid, living in Ebury Street, addicted to mild dissipations in the way of serious entertainments at Exeter Hall, and commanded her to come and assist at a very different sort of entertainment in her brother's house. He also enclosed a cheque in order that she might order a suitable dress from a good dress-maker, excusing his lavish generosity by the coarse remark, that he did not choose that she should disgrace him when she had to appear as the hostess of Grey-towers. Then he sent out his invitations right and left with due respect to position and property, and waited impatiently for the answers. The answer from most of the invited guests was much the same, though the motives that prompted that answer were widely different. Lady Wildgrave thought she might just as well run down to Blankshire, see her mother, have a breath of fresh air after the influenza; and amuse herself at the same

time, by finding out how such a heavy man as "The Great Bear" would manage such a frisky thing as a ball. Di threw back her head, and declared that she would die rather than feast at his house, when his workmen were starving ; but to her great surprise, Mr. Kindersley himself advocated a policy of conciliation, urging that it was unwise to drive Strangways to extremities, and adding, with a twinkle in his eye, that she might dance on supperless to the end if she liked, or have a private and independent set of refreshments in the secrecy of the landau, if she preferred it. Vivian threw his influence into the same side of the scale, knowing that he would have no chance of softening Strangways' heart towards his workmen, if he began by offending him. It disturbed his own peace completely to be out of charity with his neighbour, and he was anxious to seize the first opportunity of showing him, that he cherished no bitterness in his heart on account of the late contest. It was impossible for him to calm the seething

discontent in Dainton, though he did his very best, for there is an irresistible logic in an empty larder against which the finest eloquence is practically useless; but he knew that he should be in a better position to act the part of mediator when the final crash came, as come it must, if he had kept up some semblance of friendship with the manufacturer. So very much against his own inclination, he accepted the invitation, and urged Montague to do the same.

“We’ve beaten him, so we can afford to be generous,” he said cheerfully; “and if all the canvassers meet under his roof, he will see that we wish to forget the bitterness of the struggle.”

“But we can’t with his half-starved wretches before our eyes,” grumbled Jack, “and I don’t know that I wish to either.”

CHAPTER XI.

THE GREY TOWERS BALL.

"THEN you are not coming?" the question was asked with a calmness that was the result of severe effort, as Lady Wildgrave buttoned her glove, and looked at her husband with grave eyes.

"N—no," with a certain hesitation in speech which did not match with the fixity of his intention. "Fact is, I'm engaged up to the neck—dinner, supper, and all sorts of things," as he edged his way to the door.

"I asked you to keep yourself disengaged for this one night," a deep reproach in the last three words.

"Impossible, my dear. Why, I haven't a moment to myself," he replied, with the air of a distracted Cabinet Minister. "Say every-

thing that's pretty to the old lady, and don't flirt too much with the Nugget," his hand on the handle of the door.

"I suppose mother won't mind my taking Dandy instead of you? She is quite accustomed to it."

The Viscount pulled his moustaches doubtfully. "What do you say to leaving him behind?"

"Say?" standing up, her blue eyes blazing with defiance. "That I'm not going to do it; I'm not going about alone, as if nobody cared to come with me."

"All right," with a shrug of his shoulders, as if he had tried to do his duty, and was satisfied with the effort. "Only you know people *will* talk!"

"And whose fault is that?" she asked quickly. "What should I do without dear, faithful Dandy? Without him, I should be the loneliest creature in the world."

"Oh, put it mildly; lonely, with half a hundred men always round you!"

“Do I ever have my husband?”

“Just as often as you want him,” he said with a light laugh, as he kissed his hand and departed, congratulating himself on his own callousness, which he called good temper, and which prevented “his turning a hair,” as he expressed it, about his wife’s flirtations, so long as she met him with a smile and didn’t “bother.” Fully engrossed with the trifles of the moment, without a thought or a care for the future, he went on his way. Women smiled on him, men called him a good fellow, and promised to back “Cocotte,”—the horse he was going to ride the next day at Sandown—Adela de Rianos consented to wear his colours, and life seemed like one joyous holiday to the grown-up boy.

There was a cloud on Em’s face, as she wrote a hurried note to Penrose, to ask him to escort her down to Blankshire on the morrow. She was in an unusually thoughtful mood, for she felt as if she had come to a turning point in her life. Her thoughts went

back to the beginning of what she called "her new departure," when she first arrived as a bride in Grosvenor Place. She was simply infatuated about her husband, and they were as happy together as two children with similar tastes, and a festive holiday before them. It was not very long before his devotion cooled, but she tried to take it philosophically, for everybody told her that men changed as fast as the English weather-cocks, and Wildgrave was only following the natural bent of all husbands, except the old-fashioned ones who were out of society, and therefore had strange habits. Then Dandy appeared upon the scene, and found a niche waiting for him, a niche that exactly suited him, for he shrank from the fetters of matrimony, but liked to have somebody to look after in a cousinly sort of way. They were excellent comrades these two, and no word was ever said between them that might not have been shouted from the house-tops, no letter ever written that might not have

been read by the whole assembled multitude in Rotten Row. Conscious of her own utter innocence, Em depended more and more upon a friendship which, as she had said, "filled up the blanks;" but her love was still given to the husband, who seemed to prize it less and less, whilst the world looked on with its cynical smile, and waited for the end. They would have thought the end was near, if they had seen her sitting alone in her white and gold boudoir, with Penrose's answer in her hand, and a warm flush on her cheeks, as she drew a contrast between the friend and the husband, to the disadvantage of the latter. Dandy was always willing; he never said, "If I can;" there was his note:—"To The Great Bear or to the North Pole, wherever you want to go. Yours ever, Dandy."

Without one word of all the promises he had broken for her sake, he was ready to give up everything in order to come with her to a second-rate ball; whilst Wildgrave gave up nothing, and slipped out of everything if his

wishes happened to clash with her engagements. He no longer cared for his wife to look on, when he was going to ride at Sandown or Edenbridge. Another woman was to wear his colours, to console him if he failed, to share his delight if he succeeded. His wife was nothing to him but an ornamental appendage, who could take most of his social duties off his hands, and spare him a lot of trouble!

Em went down to Blankshire in a dangerous mood, but apparently in the highest spirits. She teased Jack out of his heavy gravity; she made her mother laugh till the tears ran down her cheeks, and she ran about the house with a light step, humming an air from the last new opera, to the delight of Mrs. Kent, who had complained of the dulness of The Priory lately.

Lady Wildgrave was obliged to confess that the master of Grey Towers might be a fourth-rate man, but the ball was first-rate; and that, no one even though possessed of the most

carping spirit, could deny. He had spent his money as kings used to lavish it, when they had nothing to do but to make the Commons pay, and the effect was magnificent. The immense amount of gilding, which gave a vulgar impression of aggressive wealth by day, shone out with effective splendour under the influence of electric light. The hall was a bower of roses and palms, and water-lilies floated like shining stars on a miniature lake in the centre, each flower bearing a tiny lamp. "The White Viennese," in their brilliant uniforms, played the sweetest German waltzes from a gallery at the end of the lofty ball-room, and the floors, which were a marvel of parqueterie, had been polished to such a nicety that it was difficult for any one, however steady, to preserve his equilibrium on them. Miss Louisa Strangways performed her duties conscientiously. That is to say, she shook hands with every one, and inquired after every one's health; but she could go no further. The conversation, which she was accustomed

to have with her own intimates, was as different to that which she heard going on in this bewildering, chattering crowd, as if it were in another language; so that presently she took refuge on an ottoman in a corner, where she fanned herself continuously, in spite of a block of ice close behind her which was gradually freezing her spine. She thought it would do instead of conversation, and give her an air of feeling at home; and evidently it was "quite the right thing," because she observed that every girl unfurled her fan, as soon as she stopped dancing.

Peter Strangways felt that the proudest moment of his life had come when he opened the ball in a formal quadrille, with Miss Witherington for his partner, with a lovely Viscountess and the son of a Duke for his *vis-à-vis*. His broad chest swelled with exultation, his heart beat high with self-glorification, his eyes shone with fierce admiration as he fixed them on the girl's fresh beauty, and he decided again, as he had often decided before,

that she was the only fitting jewel for such a casket as Grey Towers. Di drew back instinctively, as his admiration became more and more aggressive; and her proud little head, with its crown of chestnut curls, was held very high before the dance was ended; but as they walked down the room together, they chanced upon Jack Montague, who was leaning against the wall with an expression more fitted for the desperate risks of a forlorn hope, than for the banalities of a ball-room. Though her programme was already half-filled with names, he had not tried to secure a single dance, and her heart seemed ready to burst with passionate pain.

“You’ve got such a crowd of flowers; you might just as well spare me one for my button-hole?” Strangways suggested with a sheepishness new to himself.

Di’s long lashes fell on her soft cheeks, as she looked down on the shower of yellow roses, which is the modern expression of a bouquet. Her thoughts flew fast to that

boating party on the Thames, when Montague had been so huffy, because she laughingly suggested that if the Great Mogul threw the handkerchief in her direction, she ought to pick it up for the sake of the happiness of the greater number. Yes, he liked her well enough to be angry then, but now, he would look on at her wedding with the supremest indifference.

Then she pulled one of the roses from the wire to which it was attached, and put it quietly into Strangways' large hand without looking at him. She did not see the fierce light which leapt into the face of her host, but she *could* see—because she was watching him under her lashes—the start that Jack gave; she could hear the indignant oath which escaped his lips, and instead of being shocked, she walked on with an exultant look in her grey eyes. So he cared a wee bit after all! The little scene had been enacted, simply and solely, for the sake of that one man who composed her audience; the rest of the crowd,

and Strangways himself, were absolutely nowhere in her mind, therefore it gave her rather a shock, when she found his face much nearer to her than his natural height allowed, as his hoarse voice said with an odd sort of tremor in it, "You are out and out the nicest and the prettiest girl in Blankshire, and a slap-up place like Grey Towers is just the home for you."

She stood still under a palm in the hall, with a pear-shaped electric light illuminating her graceful figure in its simple white dress, her snow-white neck, her proud, quivering face, and her scornful eyes. "I'll make her a blaze of diamonds," he was saying to himself, half-maddened by her beauty, and by his growing sense of possession.

"Thank you, Mr. Strangways. I prefer my own." Her heart was in a flutter, and she was desperately ashamed of herself, but there was not a sign of it in her voice, which was cold though unsteady. And she looked at him as if, with all his power and his

enormous wealth, he were no more to her than the beggar who came for his weekly dole.

“You couldn’t be such a fool,” he burst out incredulously. “Your father’s place is a tidy bit of property, but it’s not a patch on this,” with a wave of his hand which embraced the lofty hall, and the whole suite of brilliantly lighted rooms beyond.

“I don’t care about that,” turning away.

“Then tell me what you *do* care for?” stepping in front of her.

“The people in it,” very quietly; and then she escaped with Charlie Kingston, who came to claim her, and to whose arm she clung as if it were saving her from drowning.

“What is up?” he asked anxiously.

“Nothing—nothing. The music, or something has got into my head,” she said hurriedly.

“I gave her credit for more sense,” Strangeways grumbled to himself, as he looked after her with a disconcerted stare. “But I suppose

it's a girl's nature to play with a man as if he was a fool of a salmon; and I can see she means to land me at last."

Supported by his own self-importance, he recovered his serenity sufficiently to fulfil his duties as a host; and the ball went on merrily as the Duchess of Richmond's before the solemn sound of distant guns hushed the frivolous strains of the dance-music, and turned the last waltz for "the loved and the lover" into a life-long farewell.

Later in the evening, Kindersley and Vivian were standing side by side surveying the animated scene with some amusement, when the crowd parted, and a tall woman in black and orange—dignified, handsome, and statuesque—stepped out of her surroundings, like a picture from its frame, and raised her grave eyes to the Vicar's face.

"Aurelia!" he exclaimed, in a tone of unbounded surprise, as he held out both hands, and took hers in his nervous grasp, "I never expected to meet you here."

“Didn’t you?” and she laughed a little, as if to carry off the seriousness of the situation. “Then I have the advantage over you, for I came because I thought I might meet you. Take me out of this crowd into some place, where we can talk without half the world as eaves-droppers.”

Vivian did not know the house a bit better than she did, but he found a small room, where tea and coffee had been served earlier in the evening, which was now deserted, and where they took possession of a sofa in a quiet corner. They had a large field to traverse in the years that had gone by since their final parting, but a sudden shyness had risen up in Vivian’s breast, and instead of questioning her as to her ways and thoughts, and habits of life, he submitted to her dominating will, and only answered the questions she put to him about the all-satisfying scope of the life he had chosen for himself. When she had elicited the fact that he was content with an existence amongst hardened drunkards and poverty-

stricken wretches, she sat with her hands clasped on her lap, and her eyes fixed on the space of carpet before her. "The waste—the terrible waste!" she murmured regretfully, as if talking to herself.

Vivian laughed. "You think I'm *too good* for it! Oh, if you only knew some of the tragedies I have to go through, your only regret would be that I wasn't half good enough."

"Tragedies with half-witted shoe-makers!" in vast contempt.

"By no means—with wits as keen as my own, but with no scope for them. They are like people living in a grey desert, with not a flower or a fountain to gladden their eyes. Think what a noble work it is to plant the flower of hope in their midst, to bring them the waters of life!" •

"But you are not the sort of man to be buried alive in a net-work of dirty slums. Your voice ought to be heard in some of our London pulpits, where crowds of the better-educated could come and hear you."

“Preach to a fashionable set of heartless, well-dressed women and dandies! No, thank you! I don’t want to tickle be-diamonded ears; I want to touch the hearts of the ragged and forlorn. I want to teach them that they are not alone in the world, that there are people who *love* them, and would give their lives to help them.”

“Love them!” raising her eyebrows disdainfully, as she looked up into his animated face with no sympathy for his enthusiasm. “I can’t fancy loving an ugly, unshaven ruffian. I should give him a sovereign to keep his distance.”

“And emphasise the disgraceful line drawn between the classes and masses! No; you wouldn’t do that,” shaking his head. “I’ve not believed half what they’ve told me of you; and you shan’t discredit yourself.”

“Tell me what they have told you.”

He hesitated. “No; but I will go so far as this, and confess that I’m thankful you did not come down here a few weeks ago.”

“Why — have you no trust in my oratory?”

“Immense. All St. Mary’s would have voted for a School Board.”

“You are wrong. I should have been on your side.”

“Impossible!” his face lighting up. “Why, I heard that you were going to stand for the London Board yourself.”

“But I changed my mind.”

“You were dis-illusioned at last?” incredulously.

“Utterly. The way they waste the funds which have been wrung from unwilling pockets is shameful. The fashion in which they treat religion, one moment, as if it were a dangerous thing to be driven into the back-ground, the next with a gibe or a sneer, as if it were of no account at all, is shocking. They spend heaps of money on unnecessaries, whilst the poorest of the poor, who ought to be their chief concern, are allowed to learn their A B C, breakfastless, and dinnerless, with nothing but rags to

cover them. The result is as far as possible from what I dreamt and hoped, and I own that you are right, and I was wrong. Are you satisfied?"

"More than satisfied—delighted. Why haven't you married an M.P., you could have written all his speeches for him."

She looked him full in the face with her grave eyes, "Because I once knew *you*," she said very gently.

The blood rushed to his forehead, "And I made you hate myself, and all other men with me?"

There was a silence. She sat perfectly still, not toying with her fan as a nervous girl might have done, whilst he watched her; all the passionate feverish love which he had given to the girl was dead in his breast, but in its place rose up a great tenderness for the woman whose life he had spoiled.

"I hated self-sacrifice," she began in a low voice—"I loved enjoyment; you went to bury yourself in a dingy country-town—I liked to

be in the full blaze of the world—You rushed into one extreme, I into another—If you climbed too high, you made me cling all the closer to the lower paths; you developed into a saint—(Vivian shook his head)—and I into a woman of the world, impatient of creeds and formulas, with my feet on the borders of secularism.”

“And am I answerable?” his face lengthening.

“You have made me what I am, to many—a success; to myself—a failure!”

“And *I* did this?” incredulously, for his conceit was small.

“Yes, you, Cyril Vivian! Having known you, I could not like ‘a lesser man;’ but if I had never known you, I should have been a better woman.”

“I can’t stand this,” and he got up from his seat in a state of great agitation. “What have I done? You make me utterly miserable!”

“Then I am satisfied,” rising slowly from

the sofa. "I couldn't *endure* to find you so content. If you had only owned yourself disappointed."

"But I couldn't—"

"No, you always were so overpoweringly honest. But now, take me back to the ball-room. You know I love the world," with a smile.

"Yes, and the world loves you," as he gave her his arm.

"Promise me one thing!" she said with great earnestness. "If there's a vacancy at St. Peter's or St. Paul's, you won't refuse to fill it?"

"I can't refuse until it's offered me."

"No, but then?"

"Even then, if I were wanted here, I must stay," he said gently.

"You will do nothing that I ask you," with great impatience. "Are all your London friends of no consequence to you?"

"They can do so very well without me.

But send for me if you really want me, and I will always come."

"On my death-bed—to say good-bye?" she asked with a scornful smile. "That wouldn't bore you much!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE CLASSES AND THE MASSES.

OUTSIDE in the hall, in a sequestered corner under a palm, and shaded by its long fronds from the light of the multitudinous lamps, sat two friends who were always meeting, and therefore never parting for long, yet always glad to see each other. There was a peculiar charm in Lady Wildgrave's beauty that night which was noted by all. She had been haunted by a vague presentiment of evil all through the day, until she received a telegram to say that Cocotte had won by half a head, and then she told herself that her misgivings were foolish. Her attack of influenza had spiritualised her delicate features, the unrest of her mind had given a feverish

brilliancy to her eyes which changed every now and then into a touching wistfulness, till Dandy felt as he sat beside her, that if he did not keep a tight check on himself he might lose his head in a moment of madness, and regret it for ever afterwards. And she, angry, disappointed, and stung by neglect, sat playing with the bunch of snow-white roses which Penrose had given her, and at the same time toying with a temptation that was strong upon her. Her husband was basking in the smiles of that horrid Spanish woman. Why should she keep her pent-up grievances in, and grudge herself—there was no one else to care—the sympathy that was waiting for her in fullest measure, close by, within touch? She had kept her wrongs to herself, and proudly refused all pity. She had held her tongue when most women would at least have confided in their bosom friends. She had held her small head higher than half of her acquaintances, and carried a brave front before the world, but she seemed at the

end of her patience to-night. And now that her fears for her husband's safety were over, she felt as if she *must* let loose some sparks from the fire of her wrath. "What an old-fashioned and ridiculous idea it is to marry the man you are fond of," she said meditatively, as she broke off a rose bud and studied its inner secrets.

"I thought it was rather a nice arrangement," said Penrose quietly.

"Then it isn't," pettishly. "If I were ever going to do it again, I should look out for one that I hated."

"I hope I shall be miles away ; but may I ask why?"

"Because I might feel sure that I should see less of him than of anybody else."

"Oh, that's it, is it?"

"Yes it *is*," with growing excitement. "Don't I see more of you any week of my life than of Wildgrave?"

His face was very grave, as he stooped to pick up the rosebud which she had flung

away in her anger. "And that's a disadvantage, of course," he said slowly. "Do you know that you are very flattering?"

She was too deeply occupied with her own grievances to notice this remark. "It makes me mad to think what he is doing at this moment," she went on, tapping the floor with her satin shoe.

"I wouldn't take it like that," soothingly. "It doesn't madden him a bit to know that you are sitting here with me,"

"*Of course* it doesn't," with emphasis; and then her sweet lips trembled, and she looked up at him through a mist of tears. "Be sorry for me, Dandy, just a little."

He bent towards her, his face a shade paler, his eyes full of an infinite compassion. "Child, I am sorrier than I can ever say."

"He was fond of me once," in a muffled voice, as a tear dropped down on her roses.

"And so he is still after his fashion," hoarsely, dropping out the words slowly,

as if constraining himself by an effort to say them.

"You should have said, after his dogs and horses, and every pretty woman he comes across—that's what I've sunk to," as the bitterness in her heart rose like a wave. "But I'm not going to mind any more," as she threw back her head, and her eyes flashed like the diamonds in her hair. "From this night, he is nothing to me—less than nothing!"

He drew a deep breath. "Em, you don't know what you are saying!"

"Don't I? I wish this horrid thing had never been on my finger!" twirling her wedding ring round under her glove.

"And so do I, with all my heart and soul!"

The words broke from him with a vehemence that astonished her, and she looked up at him with startled eyes. This from Dandy, who had never seemed to care about anything, or anybody, over much! He passed his hand over his eyes, as if he were afraid to look at

her. There was a pause. The sweet strains of a German waltz came from the ball-room, the low laugh of a well-bred girl from the other side of the hall, and then another sound, growing louder and louder, gradually to be distinguished as the tramp of many feet. It roused Penrose from dangerous thoughts, and Em from her sorrows. He started up, and went to the open glass door, which led on to the terrace. The broad gravel path-way was filling from end to end with a crowd of men, whose dark forms shut out the view of slumbering valleys and gliding river, and all the poetry of the moonlit landscape, as poverty ever interposes a screen between the poor down-trodden masses and the beauty of life. He gave a rapid glance which took in the situation in a moment, closed the door as a precautionary measure, and came back to Em with an air of the utmost unconcern.

“We are going to have some fun presently.”

“But what is it? What have all these

people come for?" looking out with eager curiosity.

"They object to our having all the fun to ourselves. Come along."

"But why? I'm not in the least afraid."

"I'm in an awful funk; fancy a stone coming, and damaging my beauty!"

In spite of her remonstrances, he hurried her away, and they came upon one affrighted group after another. The noise outside was increasing; the crowd were breaking out into cries for "Strangways" and "Bread for the Starving," &c. &c.; the band played on indefatigably with its frivolous tunes; but the dancing stopped, and the women huddled together, their gay dresses in vivid contrast to their poor faces white with terror. The doubt and uncertainty as to what would happen next was very trying to weak nerves. Miss Louisa led the way, and a number of half hysterical women followed like a flock of frightened sheep, stumbling over each other's dresses in their wild hurry to reach a place

of safety. Peter Strangways himself was in a towering rage. As to his starving hands, he had not a morsel of pity for them. This was the very 'cripex' of their offence. They had sold him over the School Board election, and now they were spoiling his ball! Curse them!

"Go out and speak to them," Montague said earnestly. "Don't you know that they can see the loaded supper-table through the windows, and the mere sight of it must madden them."

"Who asked them to come? I'll send for the police, by Gad I will, and have the whole lot put into prison."

"No, no, Strangways, try the effect of a few kind words," Vivian entreated, whilst Kindersley urged him to find out what they wanted, and then refuse to give it them or not, as he thought best.

"Not I. Am I to be dictated to in my own house by a parcel of impudent beggars? I'll send for the police, and take the nonsense

out of them." He marched to the side of the fireplace, and rang a peal on the bell, which was answered by a crash of glass, as a stone came whizzing through one of the large French windows, shattering to fragments a huge pane, and making an ugly dent on the polished floor of the ball-room. The ladies shrank back with shrieks, and the bandsmen came to a simultaneous stop, whilst Jack, Vivian, and a few others hurried outside. Doors and windows were immediately closed and shuttered by Strangways' orders, so that nothing that occurred on the terrace could be seen by those in the lower rooms. Di, unable to bear the thought of being safe, whilst her friends were in danger, ran into the hall, where she could see something of all that was going on through the glass doors. She advanced nearer to them than any of the others, and hid herself behind a palm, whilst the servants stood about, exchanging scared whispers, and every now and then suggesting that they knew the house would be burned down.

A knot of gentlemen stood on the steps, but, at first, there was such a Babel of voices that no intelligible sentence reached their ears. In the bright electric light, Vivian recognised some of the eager, excited faces, and called to their owners by name.

“What do you want, Joe? What have you come for, Mike?” he asked, in his clear, ringing voice.

“We want to see the guv’nor—Strangways! Mr. Strangways, come oot and speak to us face to face,” several people shouted hoarsely.

“He *must* come and put an end to this,” Jack said impatiently. Di saw him pass through the hall and go into the study, after a hurried inquiry of one of the servants. The master of the house was pouring out brandy with a shaky hand, when Montague burst into the room.

“Come out, for God’s sake, before mischief is done,” he said quickly. “No one can manage them but you.”

“I’m not going to risk my life. They’d kill me before I could say, Jack Robinson.”

Jack looked at his blanched face, his unsteady lips, his shaking hands. The big bully was actually afraid! With the brave man’s loathing for a coward, he gave him one look of unspeakable contempt, slammed the door, and went back again to the terrace.

When the crowd saw that Strangways was not with him, a roar of rage and disappointment broke from them. There were desperate men amongst them, who had filled their pockets with stones, picked up from a heap in the road, with the full intention of doing an injury to the house, if its master would give them no redress for their wrongs. Their appetite for revenge had been whetted by the sight of the gorgeous reception rooms, where the radiance of light, the brilliance of gilding, the beauty of flowers, and the sweetness of music, combined to make an overpowering contrast with the dinginess and the unloveliness of their own hovels; whilst the sight of

all the tables in the supper-room loaded with an abundance of food and drink, to which, for the most part, they could give no name, was exasperating to men with empty stomachs.

“Mr. Strangways refuses to see you.”

This announcement was received with groans and hisses; but a man with a keen dark face worked his way to the front, and held up his hand to claim silence. Some in the rear cried out; “Go it, Aaron, tell ’im what we wants.”

“We only wants what is just and right,” he said in a harsh voice, which he tried to keep calm. “We ain’t here to do no damage. Just tell the guv’nor that we wants our mates taken back what were wrongfully sacked for acting like Englishmen. And we begs to insist on the sack being given to his mon ’Arding instead, what has acted like a sneak. Another time we’ll talk of skin-flint wages, and hours that come pretty nigh the twenty-four; but this ’ere is the bisness we’ve come on to-night. Ain’t it mates?”

A few dissented, but the majority seemed

agreed on that point, and Montague went after Strangways for the second time, but with no better success after a long argument. He would not budge an inch; but he refused to come out, and say so. "The police will be here in ten minutes, and that will bring them to reason," he said confidently.

"It won't save your windows," Jack rejoined grimly. "Do you want them all broken?"

"If they dare to touch one of them!" he shouted with an oath.

"They are in the mood to dare anything!"

"I tell you they are the best plate glass. They cost half a fortune."

"That won't save them. Hark! there goes one!" as a loud crash was heard.

"Oh, stop—stop it, for God's sake!" pushing him towards the door.

"Will you take the men back?"

"Those —— scoundrels, not if I know it."

"It would only be right. The whole neighbourhood cries shame on you. Here's a chance for you to make yourself straight with us all."

Strangways flushed a dusky red, as he bit his thumb-nail. "Fetch Miss Witherington here. If she says 'Take them,' I'll think of it."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," indignantly. "You know her sentiments as well as I do."

In the pause that followed they could hear the constant recurring sound of carriage-wheels at the back, as the terrified guests decamped, whilst the noise in front increased to an alarming extent.

"Come, look sharp!" said Jack, impatiently, "or you'll have the house burnt down."

"Well, I'll do it for the girl's sake, mind you," he answered sullenly, after an agony of indecision.

Whilst the discussion was going on in the study, Vivian was telling those outside that there was nothing to be gained by violence, they would only put themselves in the wrong, their only strength was in union—in union with all in the same branch of trade from one end of England to the other. But they must

remember that they owed a duty to their masters, as well as to themselves ; that whilst his money kept their wives and little ones in comfort at home; his interests lay in their hands, and they had no right to prejudice them by continual and revengeful strikes, which paralysed business, destroyed all security in trade, encouraged idleness and intemperance, and brought misery on all who were concerned in them. Men and masters must bear each others' burdens, and never forget that they were members of one brotherhood, whose head was Christ. The light of many lamps fell full on his earnest, high-bred face, and there were shouts of, "Parson's right;" "Parson's on our side;" "Three cheers for the parson!" He looked down on the excited mob with a strangely sweet smile. He knew that they had been led away by unscrupulous agitators, who instilled the poison of rabid Socialism into simple minds, and did not care a straw for the ruin and starvation that lay in their track. His heart bled for them in their

utter impotence—a small weak wave breaking against the rock of Strangways' obstinacy! "Go home," he said, with a break in his voice. "I entreat you to go home."

"Go home!" cried a stranger with a coarse black beard, as he jumped upon the post from which Vivian had just stepped down. "Are ye a set of blooming cowards to go home without getting what you've come for? Don't stir a peg till you've got your mates taken back, that blessed foreman discharged, fogging done away with for ever, prices kept up at a good average, and working hours never to go beyond twelve to the day. Burn his fine house over his cursed head; that's the way to bring 'im to reason!" It was the match applied to the heap of straw, and every lawless passion in that crowd broke loose in answer to his appeal. Jack rushed out, sprang up behind the last speaker, seized him by the collar, and flung him down.

"Hold your infernal tongue, or I'll smash your head," he growled fiercely. "Now my

men, listen," he shouted, and his deep-toned voice rang out like a bell; "Mr. Strangways will take the three hundred back, if you go home at once."

For an instant there was a tremor of hesitation amongst the tumultuous throng. There was only a handful of gentlemen on the steps, in front of whom stood Jack—the lights shining on his snow-white shirt front, on his good-looking, determined face, with the look in his eyes which showed that he meant to be obeyed.

"Ye're only a set o' cowards," cried a jeering voice, "give it to the darned swell. He's only making fun of you!"

The gibe stung; stones rattled in a volley against the house, and over the group on the steps. Vivian was struck on the temple, and staggered back. Kindersley helped him into the house, and the rest of the on-lookers beat a hasty retreat. Only Jack stood his ground. One man against five-hundred—the strength of civilisation against mere brute force. "Go

home at once!" he repeated, as he folded his arms. "The police are on the road—don't be such fools as to stay, and be caught."

There were many quite willing to take his advice, and most of the Wellington Row and Stanley Lane men hung back—Crutchley and Smith amongst them. But this did not suit the purpose of the paid agitators. "Would ye starve with a supper fit for a king waiting for you? It's yours by all the rights of labour!" was their cry—and the hungry men behind them made answer to it by a rush towards the room where they had seen the food they coveted. The glass fell in fragments, but the thick wood of the shutters offered a more serious resistance. Jack, like the reckless fellow he was, dashed forward and placed himself in front of the nearest window. "Shame on you, are you thieves and blackguards?" he asked in stern reproach, as his broad chest heaved.

Many slunk back from the glance of his eye, and tried to look as if they meant no

harm ; but again, the ringleader, who had played on their passions all the while, ran to the front with a wooden mallet in his hand.

“Look out, Jack,” Dandy shouted, as he ran out with a reinforcement to help, after having sent Lady Wildgrave home.

Jack turned, and the mallet descended on his bare head. Penrose sprang forward, too late to save him from falling with a heavy thud on the ground, but just in time to wrench the mallet from the ruffian’s hand, and pay back his blow with fullest vengeance. He gave a howl of pain, and would have made off, but the Colonel seized him by the collar. Mike, Joe, and others to whom Montague had been kind, hurried back on the report that he was hurt, and formed a ring round him ; but most of the men were too excited to know what had happened, and still kept hammering at the closed shutters, and shouting out for Strangways. A housemaid peeped her head timidly out of an upper window, and drawing

it in again, yelled out, with a scream that re-echoed through the house :

“Mr. Montague’s killed. We shall all be murdered next ! Lord, ha’ mercy upon us.”

Di heard it, and started to her feet. Vivian, lying limp and exhausted in an arm-chair, saw that she was half-maddened by the shock, and tried to raise himself in order to go to her ; but, long before he could reach her, she had unfastened the doors with her trembling hands, and sped out into the tumult and noise, unconscious of anything but the frantic necessity to see with her own eyes if Jack Montague were dead or alive. “Let me pass,” she panted, for her breath seemed gone, and the rough men drew back instantly, looking at her with awestruck eyes, as if she were an angel flown down from heaven. She dropped down on her knees, crushing the beauty out of the white roses on her dress, whilst even her father, and Dandy, who was supporting Jack’s head, watched her as if they were spell-

bound. "Jack, speak to me; look at me; don't go without a word," she implored in a low hurried voice. And, as if only too glad to answer her agonised appeal, his blue eyes opened and looked straight into hers, reading at one glance the secret of her heart, which was shining out from under her long lashes.

Then the Colonel tapped her on the shoulder. "Don't make a fool of yourself," he said, in an impatient whisper, "Jack's no more dead than I am!"

She got up in a bewildered way, tried to speak, but failed, and, shaking all over, covered her face with her hands. Her father hurried her away into the house, and, just as he closed the doors upon her, there was a cry that the police were coming, and a general stampede ensued. As they marched on to the terrace prepared for immediate retributive action, somebody turned off the electric light, and the whole garden was plunged into darkness. The police and the rioters had exciting chases over flower-beds and shrubberies; but very few

of the latter were arrested, except the man whom the Colonel had already captured and delivered into safe custody. Two constables took each other up instead of Mike Crutchley and Joe Smith, and were too cross to see the force of the joke, when each stared into his comrade's familiar face.

The noise created by pursued and pursuers died away in the distance, a dead silence settled on the house and terrace, and Strangways emerged from his study, ready to rave and bluster over the wreck of broken glass, the untasted supper, and his ruined ball; but there was no one to listen to him, for his guests had gone away!

CHAPTER XIII.

VIVIAN SPEAKS.

JACK MONTAGUE'S hurts were not very serious after all, and he was soon recovered enough to insist upon seeing Vivian home, in spite of his urgent remonstrances. Mrs. Faircloth, who performed the duties of housekeeper to the three clerics, made a great fuss over her master when he came in, looking like an ill-used ghost, with his white face bandaged up in a silk pocket-handkerchief, and proposed to send for the doctor at once; but Vivian pooh-poohed her in his firm but gentle way, and, as soon as his cut was washed—discovered to be only a flesh wound—and the bleeding stopped, he horrified her still more by establishing himself in an arm-chair, and announcing his

intention of smoking a cigar with Montague in order to steady his nerves.

"There, now you're comfortable. Nothing like a weed for a broken head, or a broken heart," Jack said with a laugh. "I only hope that beastly stone has done you no lasting damage."

"I daresay I shall be all right in a day or two; but I say, Jack," using his Christian name for the first time, and looking at him with earnest eyes: "One good turn deserves another. You've been a good friend to me to-night, as you always are, indeed, and I want to make some return. I've waited long for a chance to speak, and I can't have a better than the present one. You see," he went on with a smile, "I have you at a disadvantage. I am weak and hurt, and you are far too big and strong to mind what I say. Promise not to be angry, and bear with me till I have done, for your own sake, and *for hers*," he added in a low voice.

Jack turned away, and bent his face on his

hand. A short time before, a word from any one about his private sorrow would have been met with scant courtesy, but to-night, when every pulse was throbbing with the remembrance of the look in a pair of lovely grey eyes, he felt that he could neither speak nor think of anything else. If Di Witherington actually loved him, the situation became more complicated than ever; but he must think it out later on. At present, he only nodded his head in answer, without raising it.

"You have been trying an impossibility," Vivian began; "and I've been watching you for weeks past—yes, and praying for you too. I should have spoken long ago if you had been in a lower station of life, and given you such advice as I could. Possibly I have been remiss in not doing so, but in our class there are high barriers between a man and even his best friend, so I could but wait, and pray for an opportunity; and I have it now." He paused, and then went on, as Jack still remained silent. "I know little or nothing of

your past life, and I don't seek to know anything till you choose to tell me ; but I can see, for myself, that there is something in that past life which is standing between you and one of the best girls that ever lived, a girl who loves you—you know it to-night, if you never did before, whose peace of mind you are destroying by your present attitude towards her. You know that too. And more than this, this something is standing between you and your God. You are not leading a consistent Christian life—you must acknowledge that—and this which is wrecking your life, and that of this pure-hearted girl, which is forming a barrier between you and your God, must be sin ; and therefore I am the more bound to speak to you, because it is my duty to deal with sin, and to help those who suffer from its ravages."

"You speak of sin," said Jack bitterly, "as if it were a thing to be handled, and put on one side and forgotten. I have tried that, tried hard, and failed."

“No, not like that,” he said quietly, “but as a disease, as real as any of the thousand physical ones that attack the body, only more dangerous because more malignant. The stronger the identity, or the will, the stronger the disease,” he went on rapidly, “the greater need too of medical treatment. A most insidious disease, because it cannot be palpably diagnosed; and its victim may go through periods of apparent freedom from it, begin to feel, and even to appear healthy, till suddenly some every-day occurrence, or trifling accident, brings back a flood of memory, and in that flood it returns in force, and the whole battle has to be re-fought on the same ground, and with the same weapons, only the hand that wielded those weapons is weaker now; and with each attack grows weaker still. Oh,” raising his hand with the vehemence of his speech, “the history of Samson is no mere historical fact, though fact it is without doubt, but a wonderful object lesson on the ravages of sin upon ordinary lives, a perfect demons-

tration of the impossibility of making any compromise with mammon, if you would serve God."

"Vivian, you will drive me mad!" exclaimed Jack, starting up, and pacing the room hurriedly. "Isn't it enough to have to battle against such a disease, without being told that it is hopeless? I tell you," suddenly facing Vivian with flashing eyes, "you are right; it is all true what you say. I've come through it all—a fire, a flame. I am in it now; it has driven me hither and thither over the face of the earth seeking rest, and I've found none. I came home to my mother, and here I met that girl, and, fool that I was, I dared to hope that she would bring me to peace at last. I loved her—do you hear? and was mad enough to forget everything, until, just as you say, a few accidental words brought back the hideous past, with all its hideousness redoubled. I tell you, if it weren't for my mother, I wouldn't stay a day in this place, or this country, to be a curse to her. Oh, there's nothing for it but

the blankest despair!" He sank back into his chair, covering his face with his hands, and breathing heavily, in an agony of suffering.

"Jack, I never told you to despair," Vivian said, looking tenderly at him. "You've tried one way of getting rid of your burden, and you have failed. Will you try the right way? Listen!" Jack raised his head, with a hard, almost fierce expression in his eyes. "You say you've been hurried hither and thither by this sin, trying in travel, sport, friendship and society, to forget it. You came home, and in filial affection and honest love tried again; but each attempt has failed. And yet, oh wonderful paradox! here you are assuring me, that if it weren't for the love you bear your mother, you would go on trying the same miserable medicine—another fruitless exile! Is the love of that young girl nothing? Haven't you got to consider her at all? Oh, I know," he went on, as Jack made an impatient movement, "you would say, 'It is the kindest thing I could do—she will soon forget.' Let me tell

you that is *not* true. Natures like hers do not forget, and you are cruel as well as selfish. You have made her love you, and it is but ordinary justice that you should try to make yourself worthy of her love."

"What can I do that I have not done?" he asked hoarsely. "Tell me; there is nothing that I would not try."

Vivian leant forward, with his extinct cigar in his hand. "If you were suffering from some bodily ailment, you would of course take skilled advice. This you have utterly neglected to do in your mental pain, and hence your present position. Remember how He said: 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden.' You have not been to Him, you have shunned Him, you have excommunicated yourself, you have attempted to get round, over, underneath your difficulty, instead of going through the midst of it boldly with His Almighty help. Make your confession to God, and if you cannot by this means quiet your own conscience, come to me, or to some

other 'discreet and learned minister'—you know how the prayer-book puts it—and open your grief, that you may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly comfort and advice. Oh! come back to your church," he pleaded earnestly, "and find rest. Fear not the world's judgment, but only God's. Hide nothing; let all come out, and then there shall be peace for her, peace for your dear mother and yourself, whatever the consequences may be."

He paused, and there was no sound heard in the room but the ticking of the clock, or, as it seemed to Jack, the throbbing of his own heart. He lifted his face; it was very pale, but it wore a softer, almost a hopeful expression.

"You are a good man, Vivian," he began, brokenly. "I owe you more than I can say. You are quite right. Will you hear my story, and advise me?"

Vivian smiled. "Surely I will." And Jack started at once, giving little by little the

history of his life, four years ago, growing more and more excited as he went on till he came to the scene at the "Miners' Rest." "You see," he said when he had finished, as he wiped the cold sweat from his forehead, "I had lived with this man, joined in his sins and follies, shared in his excesses, gambled with him, till he became so bad that my better nature revolted. But when he attempted my life, I lost all control. Before God, I never intended to hurt him. I seized him, flung him away, and killed him; and then after all these years—think of it, Vivian, and pity me! —I find that he was Mrs. Witherington's son —*her* half-brother. Oh, God! it's too hideous, too cruel!"

Again a silence fell on the two men. Jack's story made a deep impression on the priest's sensitive nature. His despair and misery affected him acutely; thoughts came rushing into his mind, words of sympathy to his tongue, but his knowledge of human nature made him pause before speaking. The present

moments were of untold value, but a wrong expression, or mode of treatment, might be fatal to the good he wished to effect. "Poor fellow," he said kindly, as he leant forward and put his hand on Jack's shoulder; "what a terrible sorrow; how much you have suffered; what a gigantic mistake you have made, and what a frail reed you have leant on!"

"Mistake!" said Jack wearily. "Yes, you may call it one; but a mistake which can't be undone—a bed on which I must lie for ever."

"Now, God forbid!" was the answer that fell from Vivian's lips with extraordinary emphasis. "Would you tell a man who has fallen into the sin of drunkenness, to go on as he has begun—to make no effort to regain his self-respect and shake off his sin? No. Well, I tell you the cases are the same; it is only a matter of degree. You put all the stress on the fact of having killed this man in a fit of mad passion, but still it was in defence of your own life—by accident, too—for if ever a

life was taken by accident, Moseley's was. Do you think the world would condemn you for this? No right-thinking man would ever blame you for such an action; but, Jack, this was but the eruption, not the disease. No doctor would treat the eruption of a fever, he would treat the fever itself, deep-seated, out of sight. Your disease was the dissolute life you had led with this man, and you have failed to come for treatment, failed to humble yourself. You have trusted in yourself alone. Now surely you will know better. Ask God to forgive you your pride and your distrust of Him. Ask Him for His help that His Holy Spirit may guide you to the truth, Jack. Be reconciled with your God, and then go like a man and tell this girl what you have told me to-night, frankly, keeping nothing back; and I tell you, that whether you are to come together or not, this is certain, that you shall find peace. It is hard, isn't it, to kick against the pricks—hard to do now what ought to have been done four years ago? You have

tried to cast out this devil, and you've failed. Take yourself to Christ, and you will succeed, for this result comes only by prayer, and fasting, and obedience."

A new light broke over Jack's soul; his whole face changed, his mind, ever open to good influence, was made up. "I will, Vivian," he said hurriedly, "I give you my word, I will, and may God forgive me for the past!" And then in that quiet study, the two knelt down and prayed, as one at least had never prayed before, that God would help and strengthen this poor, mistaken man to do his duty in this matter, and lend him grace that in the new future before him, he might have strength to persevere in the service of Christ. And so with new strength and firm purpose, Jack drove home in the hush of the early morning. The dark shadows of the old life were passing away like the shades of the night, and a new life was dawning in his troubled soul, like the day which was rising in roseate beauty behind

the fir-clad hills—a life infinitely brighter, because with less of self, and more of Christ. And as the birds broke out into their joyous matins, and the dewy fields and misty woods woke into sudden beauty under the kiss of the sun, his heart rose up in eager response, and went higher than Nature, to Nature's God.

CHAPTER XIV.

COCOTTE'S FAULT.

“COME at once, his lordship very ill.” That was the telegram which Lady Wildgrave found on the hall-table at The Priory. Nobody had thought it of any consequence, for telegrams about little nothings were always arriving from one of the Viscountess’s many acquaintances ; and it was generally known in the house that her husband had been successful at the races, so that Mason felt sure that nothing could have gone wrong with him, and therefore decided that the orange envelope could very well wait till Lady Wildgrave returned from Grey Towers. Unfortunately she was alone in her first horror and dismay, for Penrose had sent her home as soon as the riot seemed to be getting serious ; and she had

only Mason to appeal to, as she sat down in one of the hall chairs, a pathetic little figure in a smart ball-dress, with which her white, scared face seemed very incongruous. She sat quite still after the butler had looked at the timetable, and told her that there was no train for many hours, her hands clasped in her lap, her eyes fixed dully on a stand of hot-house flowers. Wildgrave ill! How had it come about? She could not understand it. He had never had a day's illness to spoil his supreme content with life. He was always so bright, so full of life and fun. She could not imagine what he would look like with no sparkle in his eyes, no smile on his cheerful lips. Only that night she had thought of him so harshly, she had talked of him so unkindly and disloyally, and perhaps he would die before she could tell him that she never meant it, that she loved no one half so well as her young husband with all his faults. She started to her feet. "I can't wait; I must go to him, if I walk every inch of the way," she cried breathlessly.

"At least, my lady, you will change your dress," Mason suggested perplexedly, not feeling equal to distinguishing himself in a crisis.

"I had forgotten that!" as she looked down at her beautiful gown with a shiver of disgust; and then she hurried upstairs with useless haste, and the old butler looked after her retreating figure with a feeling of relief. "Don't know how to tackle a woman in times of affliction," he said to himself, with a shake of his respectable grey head, "but I fancy a glass of Burgundy would pick her up a bit, and I'll go and see after it."

Penrose was the first to get back, having driven home with Mr. Kindersley and his daughter. Flo was in a state of the greatest anxiety about her friends in the slums, and said she would not sleep a wink for thinking of them and their probable fate; but Lord Raymond forgot them promptly, and the tune that he was whistling died away on his lips, when he found Mason on The Priory steps,

with "calamity" written on every line of his face. Montague arrived just in time to start with his sister, and the three travelled up to town together. London had an unfamiliar look to Em as she drove the short distance from Victoria to Grosvenor Place. She was in a fever to get there, but when they stopped at No. 200, she shrank back as if afraid to get out. The door was thrown open at once, and several servants were standing about the hall on the look out for their mistress. She sped past them without asking a single question, and would have flown upstairs; but the house-keeper stopped her, with pitying eyes fixed on her frightened face: "Not there, my lady; in the smoking-room."

"Oh, why? that won't be comfortable," she said regretfully; but when she entered the room, and saw her husband lying unnaturally straight and still on a Turkish divan, all thought about comfort went out of her head, and a choking sob rose in her throat. Could that be Wildgrave? Somebody came

towards her, and said gently, "He is quite conscious. You are just in time."

"Just in time! Good God!" she staggered as she clutched hold of Jack's arm, thinking the words, but not saying them, and looking up into Charlie Kingston's face with eyes too full of horror to recognise him. The next moment she was kneeling by the divan, and the doctor, who had been administering a cordial in order to keep up the patient's strength till the arrival of his wife, slipped out of the room with the others, and Em was left alone with her husband—sobbing her heart away.

"Come, cheer up, little woman," he said in a voice weak as a child's, "there's a heap of things I want to say to you."

"But why, why are you here?" lifting her face all wet with tears. She meant to ask how he was hurt—what accident it was that had brought him to this—but the right words would not come.

"Cocotte's fault, or did I dream it?"

"But you *won?*" she asked in the bewilderment of her brain. It seemed weeks already since she received that first delusive telegram.

"I won, sure enough," and, even then, a spark of satisfaction at his success lit up his failing eyes; "but the little rascal chucked me over her head at the post."

"And—and you are dreadfully hurt?" her voice unsteady as her lips.

"She has settled me."

"Oh, but something must be done," she cried breathlessly. "I'll send for Sir Spencer Smith."

"No use. All the doctors in London—" he broke off, for he felt his strength was slipping from him—like everything else—time, pleasure, opportunity, love, all going from him; and leaving him stranded on an unknown shore. "Em, I've got to throw up the sponge—no use to make a fuss."

"No—no. You *can't*. We are going to be happier than we ever were before." She

took his helpless hand in hers, and kissed it passionately. "You don't know how wicked I was to-night; I said, I wished I had never married. Forgive me! Forgive me! I never meant it," in an agony of remorse and penitence.

He looked at her with a slow wonder in his eyes. Wished that she had never been married?—Of course she did every day of her life. "You've been the best little woman that ever breathed," he said, and for the first time his voice shook with some feeling. "I've done what I could for you; old 'Stick-in-the mud' (his invariable name for his family solicitor) saw to that." And then his eyes wandered to the chair on which his jacket with the gay rose and white hoops was lying, and he fancied himself back on the race-course, with the eager crowd looking on, and the hoarse shout of "Cocotte wins" ringing in his ears. He would never ride again; never astonish the fellows with his good luck at cards; never handle his favourite Purdy, or

see bird, or beast, drop before his unerring aim ; never feel his heart beat faster for a woman's smile—and all the rest of it. What a blank wall rose up before him ! He drew a deep breath ; and his white cheeks blanched a little more.

Em watched him breathlessly, and the awe grew deeper in her face, as the fearful truth forced itself upon her mind that he was really going to die, and that nothing could be done to save him. If he died—what then ? What *would* become of his soul ? Should she offer to read a few verses of the Bible, or to say a prayer ? Oh, if Mr. Kindersley, that kind old friend, were only here ! If she had only thought of it, she could have brought him so easily ; and now, the fearful responsibility weighed down her heart and dried her tears. The colour rushed into her face. “ Shall I read to you ? ” she asked softly.

“ Read ? No ! ” raising his eyebrows in slight surprise, “ I would rather hear you talk.”

“But, the Bible?” in a whisper.

A positive look of amusement crept over his wan face. “Too late for that sort of thing. I’ve had a jolly good time, and I’m not so mean as to grumble; but I can’t—I can’t, don’t you see?”

He stopped, unable to express what he meant, that after the sort of life he had led, he could not make a pretence of turning pious at the last. “Let Jack have Cocotte.”

“He wouldn’t have her for anything,” with a shudder.

“Won’t he?—When he gets the chance. And Dandy, he shall have something else,” a slight twitch about the drooping tips of his moustaches. “Where is he?”

“Outside, waiting; but darling, say one prayer,” she entreated, “or let me say it for you.” Without waiting for his consent in her great earnestness, she bent her head and repeated the Lord’s Prayer, for it was the only one she could remember at the moment, her voice growing steadier as she went on.

He closed his eyes, and seemed to listen. "Don't you want to go to heaven?" she said wistfully.

He looked at her curiously. "It's all a toss up, you see, and I'm not exactly"—a slight smile on his lips—"exactly"—he wanted to say—"not exactly the sort of fellow to go there;" but he had no time, the clouds were gathering over his brain, the powers of speech were failing, he had wasted all the days, weeks, months, years, of his manhood, but he had not a moment then; so with a good-bye in his eyes, and that strange fixed smile on his lips, he passed away into the land of shadows.

When Jack and Lord Raymond stole into the room, they found Em kneeling by the sofa, her golden head resting on her husband's silent heart, his cold, unresponsive hand clasped tight in both her own little warm ones.

CHAPTER XV.

A NAME WITHOUT A SPOT.

THE sudden death of the popular young Viscount in the opening of the season, when every man of his set was preparing for a cheerful course of dissipation, came with as startling an effect as Beethoven's funeral march would produce if played by the organist at St. George's, Hanover Square, just as a bride was making her blushing way down the aisle. The paragraphs in the papers, eulogistic and mendacious as they were, according to custom, about "the universally regretted young nobleman," gave sincere pleasure to Mrs. Montague, who read them out to her daughter with a tear in her eye, and a tremble in her voice, and the comfortable remembrance that she had always believed in his good

qualities, in spite of her son's, and Mr. Kindersley's adverse opinion. Jack had not a word to say against his brother-in-law, now that he was no longer there to defend himself; indeed, he felt very kindly towards him, when Kingston, who had seen the accident, told him that Wildgrave's first thought, as soon as he recovered consciousness, was to send a telegram to his wife to inform her of his success, without saying a word about his fall. It was only when his hurts had been examined by his own doctor in London, and he knew for a fact that his life could only last for a few hours, that he allowed her to be sent for. His conscience had not troubled him much about his neglect and his constant faithlessness, but he shrank from the thought of drowning her happy laughter in a flood of tears because of his own physical sufferings; and he could not bear the idea that she should break her little heart for a husband, who had never been a pattern Benedict since the days of their brief honeymoon. He was possessed

with the gruesome idea that he would feel very small under the sod if she made a great fuss over his death, instead of being glad as common-sense would tell her to be, at having got rid of a thoroughly useless article. But death took him away before he could give her any advice about her future conduct, and Em cried over her young husband as plentifully, and as bitterly, as if he had been the joy of her wedded life, the perfect realisation of all her loving expectations. Such is the power of magnanimous forgetfulness displayed by many women, whose love has nothing to do with the vices or virtues of the object. Mrs. Montague devoted herself entirely to her daughter, and accompanied her to Wildgrave Hall, the family place in Berkshire, which would go to the next heir, with the title; but which he had placed at the widow's disposal for the next six months. No. 200, Grosvenor Place was shut up—a blank space to which no one ever came—and the carriages passed on without stopping at the door, and life went

by on its ceaseless round of pleasures, and the gay crowd thronged to the members' lawn at Sandown, and no one gave a thought to the young life thrown away on the trampled grass ; and there was no void left by his empty place, for somebody else stepped into it, and regret for the one that was gone was merged into a hearty welcome to the new comer, for the season was in full swing, and there was no time to think and not half a moment to spare for grief. Lord Raymond Penrose was the one exception. He missed his cousin's cheerful face wherever he went, and he missed still more his own oft-repeated visits to Grosvenor Place. He appreciated the delicacy of his position thoroughly, for he knew what to expect from the world. If he had done what his heart suggested, he would have run down to the little place in Berkshire, and found his greatest pleasure in comforting the young widow in her first blank loneliness ; but the gossips would have cried "shame" at once, and vowed that he was in an indecent hurry

to step into a dead man's shoes. On the other hand, if he stayed away and utterly neglected her, they would probably hint that he did not scruple to flirt with his cousin's wife to any extent, but that he took care to keep his distance now that she was a widow, lest she should wish to be Lady Raymond. In this dilemma, he was rather glad when his father, the Duke, asked him to go over to Canada, and find out Sir John Macdonald's real views on an important question of treaty rights, which he intended one day to bring before the House of Lords. Dandy jumped at the proposal, which would keep him out of mischief for a season, and prevent Em from thinking that he had forsaken her. And as Montague was alone at The Priory, he thought it was possible to induce him to accompany him. But to his surprise Jack gave him a hesitating reply. He could not answer for his own movements, he said in excuse, but he might be able to join him later on. At present he had business to see after at Derwent's

Cray, and till that was settled it was really impossible to know whether he could leave England or not. Dandy smiled as he read between the lines. "Wish him good luck, poor chap, but why in the name of common sense didn't he do it months ago? For all he knew I might have spooned her myself. I did my level best," he said, with that frankness which is kept for a man's inner self, "but Em took the shine out of every one else, dear little woman." A smile hung about his face as he remembered that she was free to love, and free to have him, with no one to stand between! His heart leapt with the thought; and the fruit, though unforbidden, had not lost the least scrap of its sweetness, for it had only ripened to a grander and more lasting perfection through those two long years of waiting and probation.

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For once in his life, Jack Montague was thankful to be alone, in order that he might solemnly think over Vivian's words and put

their lesson into practice. He saw the error of his ways as clearly as any outsider could have seen them—which is saying a great deal --and he was not the sort of man to persist in pursuing a road, when he had found that it led in a wrong direction. On Whit-Sunday, he went to Vivian's little church by the river, and there, amongst the rough men who had learnt to bless his name, but who knew nothing of his self-imposed excommunication, he confessed his sins and received the Holy Eucharist. And thus having made his peace with God, he knew that his next step was confession to man, and he resolved to make a clean breast of everything to the Colonel, and the Colonel's daughter, as soon as possible. Mrs. Witherington was so utterly unreasonable, so ready to make a grievance out of anything, so willing to dig up a dead sorrow and carry it about with her, to the torment of her family, that Vivian and he had decided that it should be left to her husband's discretion as to whether she should be told the manner of her son's

death, or not. Jack vividly remembered her tender tone when she spoke of Dick Moseley, as if he had been a sort of nineteenth-century angel, instead of a worthless scamp; and it made him shiver, in spite of the sudden warmth of that spring day, as he walked through the woods on his way to The Wilderness, to think that she would be certain to regard him in the crudest, harshest fashion, without the shadow of an excuse or a shred of extenuation, as the fiendish murderer of her best-loved son. He also remembered for his own especial torture, how Di had told him on the day of that never-to-be-forgotten water-party, that she used to lie awake at night, though she was only a child, crying over the fate of some mysterious individual who was sent away all alone—and who could have been nobody else but this same, wretched Moseley. In what sort of light would she regard him—Jack Montague—when he told her, in the bald terms that a man was sure to use who hated to trade on sentiment, that this brother whom she cried

over had died by his hand? He pictured the horror growing on her sweet young face—the instinctive shrinking from the touch of his hand, or the glance of his eyes—he could hear the cold tone in which she would ask him to go, and never to let her see his face again. And he would have to go, like a second Ishmael, out into the wilderness of a world without Di Witherington. Em would be with his mother, or his mother with Em, so he would be free to banish himself in the farthest corner of the earth—of course under the common excuse of sport, or the modern craze of a voyage round the world. Well he *must* brave it—he had incurred a debt, and the full price must be paid, with no grudging of the odd half-pence. He had made up his mind not to shirk at the last, and that very afternoon he meant to put his resolution to the crucial test. The place had never looked so beautiful to him before—the golden sunshine playing on the early green of the shimmering leaves, the deep shadows where the branches came so close together as

to shut out the sky, the blue bells springing up through last year's withered leaves like new hopes rising from the ashes of past sorrows—the glamour of the spring was upon every leaf and every flower, even the river down there in the valley seemed to rejoice in its eternal youth, and sang a joyous good-bye to the reeds and rushes on its banks, as it rushed on like the wild and wilful to its fated end. Jack put up his hand to shade his eyes, and gave a look round, as if he wished to impress the old grey house and its picturesque surroundings on the retina of his mind. He had chosen to walk, instead of coming, as usual, on his horse or in his cart, because he wanted to take a quiet look at the old familiar nooks in woods and gardens, which he was never likely to see again. He felt as if he had been sentenced to die that night, and, like the convict who makes a good breakfast, knowing that he will never have the chance of digesting another meal, he meant to make the most of every moment of the day. It was the last time that

these old friends—he called them “old” because their friendship had had such rapid growth—would look upon him with any kindness—the last time that he would ever play in the annual match of The Priory against The Wilderness—the last time that he would ever look on the sweetest face that ever smiled on man, for his salvation or perdition. He pulled himself together, and walked on with a resolute step, and the next minute caught sight of Phil, hurrying down the slope of the lawn to greet him in his usual hearty fashion. The young Oxonian slipped his arm within Montague’s, and led him across the lawns and down the shrubberies, evidently showing by his manœuvre that he had something to say to him. Jack waited until it all came out. The boy’s love had developed fast after that slight check at Christmas, and he had made up his mind to propose to Flora Kindersley before the end of the Vac’.

“You are not very old, Phil,” Jack suggested cautiously, desperately afraid of giving

offence on this particularly tender point, and yet feeling obliged to go as far as that to support his character of mentor.

“Don’t you see, if I wait, some other fellow will carry her off?” as he leant over a gate at the end of the shrubbery, and fixed his eyes on a wreath of smoke in the valley, which probably came from the Rectory kitchen-chimney.

“That’s hardly complimentary.”

“Don’t see that. Why should she like me better than any one else? I know I’m a duffer, and never likely to do anything fine,” his pink and white complexion changing rapidly to crimson; “but I wouldn’t disgrace her,” throwing back his head proudly, “and I would be as proud of her as if she were a Queen!”

Jack laid his hand on the boy’s shoulder.

“I wish you luck, old boy, and if she’s doubtful, refer her to me, and I will tell her that she might do worse.”

Phil looked up into his face with grateful eyes. “She knows the best and the worst of

me, that's one thing, so I shan't take her by surprise if I turn out an ordinary mortal."

"You've got a name without a spot on it; you've never done anything to be ashamed of—is that nothing?" Montague said in a low hurried voice, as he contrasted Phil's position with his own.

"Why, of course, if I had been a sweep of that sort, or any sort, I'd have put half the world between us," he said, with unconscious cruelty.

"Ah! but you would have taken her with you in your mind, and in your heart. You would have left her behind, so that you couldn't see her face or hear her voice, but both would have haunted you day and night," grasping the top-rail of the gate, as if he would break it in two.

"And, perhaps, it would have made a better man of me in the end," said Phil, softly, as he remembered how the thought of Flo in her innocence had helped him to keep his life clean and pure.

"But, look here," with a sudden change, "we are forgetting cricket, and the match was to begin at half-past eleven. A ripping day, isn't it?"

"Yes, as if summer had sent on somebody to say she was coming, The last day anywhere is always the best."

"You talk as if we were in lodgings, with notice to quit. Thank goodness, no one can turn either of us out. It would be beastly to go away just as you had begun to feel that you loved the old place, as much as if it were your nearest relative. What a jolly time we've had together, Jack," Phil went on, with a sigh of satisfaction, quite forgetting the coolness that had risen up to a certain extent between the two families, and treading on Montague's toes at every word; "and I bet that we shall be chums to the end of the chapter, don't you?"

"No." Jack caught hold of a young tender shoot from the nearest tree, and tore it to pieces, as if he had a special spite against it.

"When a wife comes in, chums go to the wall."

"Ah! but you are a chum of hers, too," and the boy, in his irrepressible happiness, threw his cap into the air, where it lodged in the branches of a syringa, from which he had great trouble in getting it down.

Jack walked on to the cricket-ground, and cast an eager glance round. In deference to his deep mourning no lookers-on had been invited, and the match was to be a private affair between the two friendly teams; but surely Di would be there.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNDER THE APPLE-TREE.

WOMEN are said to be constant or inconstant, tender or cruel, according to the experience of the men who talk of them ; but there is one point on which all men agree, that they are quicker in their perceptions than are the opposite sex. Di Witherington had not been five minutes in Montague's company, before she was conscious of a subtle change in him. At times, during the course of the day, she caught an expression of the utmost sadness on his face ; but his manner had lost all its coldness and constraint, and instead of avoiding her as much as was consistent with ordinary politeness, he threw himself down at her feet, and stretched his long limbs over the young

daisies, as soon as he was released from the wickets. Flo kept the score as usual, and the game went on with great spirit ; but conversation flagged like a stream in the heat of the summer, and two, at least, out of the group under the old thorn were so deeply occupied with their own thoughts, that they had no employment for their tongues. Mr. Kindersley thought Jack's attitude at Miss Witherington's feet was a most satisfactory position, and hoped that the shadow which had rested so palpably on his life had passed away from it for ever. He had noticed his tall figure and broad shoulders amongst the congregation at the evening service, and knew that Di had caught sight of it too from the resolute turn of her head in a different direction. She even ruthlessly ignored Montague's want of a hymn-book, and he was consequently obliged to look over one, with a short little woman, who sang with unction in a piping voice. The Rector rejoiced, and gave thanks for the return of the wandering sheep, in the privacy of his own

heart; but he said not a word to any one about the matter, waiting patiently till Jack should take him into his confidence.

The match was drawing to a close, and all the Priorites were busy fielding, when Di slipped away, unnoticed by either Phil or Flo, who did not seem to be talking much, but had a great deal to say with their eyes—a kind of conversation in which no one else was wanted to join. Puzzled and perplexed, with a dawning hope budding, as all the trees were budding round her, chilled by a revulsion of pride, as they would probably be on the morrow by an east wind, not knowing what to expect, unable to sit still because of the unrest that possessed her mind, she wandered on through the lights and shadows cast by the waving branches. Ever since the dance at Grey Towers she had been in a self-torturing state of humiliation, uncertain as to how far she had betrayed her feelings on the terrace, and wild to know if Montague were conscious of the fact that she had been there at all. Perhaps his altered

demeanour was a mere consequence of it, and her cheeks flushed hotly as she thought it might well be so. Perhaps he was coming back to her out of *compassion*—and could anything be a greater depth of ignominy?

She would ask her father to take her away. They had often planned a trip to Switzerland, but it had never come off, owing to one reason or another. Phil had no taste for travelling, and Di never liked to leave him; but now he was so wrapped up in Flo, that for the first time in her life, she felt no longer necessary to him. At least, by going voluntarily away, she could prove that Mr. Montague was by no means necessary to *her*, and in order to attain that desirable object, she was willing to disregard her own comfort to any extent.

She leant against an old apple-tree, which had thrust itself in amongst the deodaras, American willows, &c., of the shrubbery, and now put on a braver appearance than any of its more aristocratic brethren, because of its pink and white blossoms which had clothed it

in a garment of beauty. Back went her thoughts through the past year with its pains and pleasures, its struggles, defeats, and victories. How gradually Mr. Montague had mixed himself up in all of them till the distinct threads of their two lives seemed to be inextricably tangled, and only to make one complete whole together. Then came the night of Mrs. Montague's illness, when Mr. Montague had slipped away so suddenly, and had never been the same again. It was as if Fate had come in like a malevolent old woman and snipped the threads in two with her pair of scissors, leaving them for ever apart, slipping further and further from each other as the months went by.

"I want to speak to you." As she thought of him, Jack stood before her in his white flannels, with a tense expression on his face and in his eyes, an expression which made her heart beat faster, and sent the blood with a wild rush to her head. "Would you mind sitting down?" he went on, in a voice from

which he had tried to eliminate all feeling. "I've a long story to tell you, and I want you to listen to it, as if you were the stranger you were, a year ago."

"I don't want to hear it." And she put out her hands, as if to keep some horror from her; and yet an eager curiosity rose up within her, struggling with this nameless fear. "Keep it to yourself, *please*. I must go back to the match."

"The match is over," he said quietly. "I'll cut it as short as I can. It's the last time, you know."

"Are you going away? Ah! so am I. Is it to be Switzerland or Cannes?" she asked quickly, as she sat down on a rough bench under an old apple-tree. "It has been too fearfully cold for so long. We are going away to be thawed."

He did not answer, as he might have done, that this day was hot enough for anything, but sat down at the further end of the bench, his hands clasped round the handle of the bat,

which he had absently brought with him, his eyes fixed on a turn of the river just visible through a gap of trees, his tongue perfectly dumb. His silence made Di feel as if she were in a dentist's chair, waiting to be operated on, and a cold shiver ran down her spine. A bee hummed over the apple-blossom above her bronze head; a spider dropped down on the hat which lay on her knee, and began with audacious industry to unwind a gossamer thread and set to work; a thrush balanced himself on the untrustworthy branch of a willow, and sang as if there were no sorrow in the world. Before the web was woven, before the song of the thrush was finished, Jack had ended his story, and the girl's face, white, almost grey with horror, looked as if she had seen a ghost.

Jack drew a deep breath. He felt as if he had dragged a ton of lead to the top of a steep mountain, and just thrown it down at the top. The exhaustion remained, but the sense of relief was enormous. His face was haggard; the sweat stood in large drops on his forehead

as he waited. He had kept back nothing ; he had told the truth in all its ugliness, extenuating and concealing nothing. She knew the worst of him, and, knowing it, must hate him with a fierce, undying hatred that would never change. She bent her face, and covered it with her shaking hands. A sunbeam peeped through the branches, and lit up her hair like burnished gold, but her attitude was one of almost broken-hearted grief. He saw her shiver, and felt that it was a shiver of loathing—loathing for him, Jack Montague, her brother's murderer ! Well, there was nothing to be done but to get up, and go out of her sight as quickly as possible. The light had gone out of his life, with all the glory of happiness and love, but that was no reason why he should stay there to be a blight on hers. He stood up slowly, and let his eyes rest on the supple girlish figure with its sun-crowned head for the last time. His whole heart went out to her with endless longing ; the wages of sin are always blasting,

but it is only the coward who shrinks from paying.

“Good-bye,” he said hoarsely, strung up to do his plain duty without evasion. “Good-bye, you shall never see my face again.” The words from Mona were ringing in his ears—

“There yawns a dark gulf ’twixt my darling and me.”

A gulf broad as the river of sin which washes the shores of despair—a gulf which, as he had realised before, neither hope nor compassion could ever bridge. He turned away, for there was no movement in the bent head, and almost groaned aloud. The next moment, a pair of small hands were clutching his arm, a girl’s sweet face was raised to his, tearful, tremulous, but full of urgent entreaty. “I won’t say good-bye,” she said, with a catch in her breath. “Why should you go? It wasn’t your fault.”

His bat fell down on the ground, as he caught her hands in his and held them tight.

His head seemed in a whirl, his heart throbbed almost to suffocation. She had not cast him off. Oh, God! what a temptation!

"You mean it? You can talk to me, touch me? You don't loathe me?" he asked incoherently.

"It was his fault, not yours," and though there were tears in her eyes, a brave smile trembled on her lips.

"Don't tempt me. You don't know what you are saying. I was mad with passion when I did it, but I did it, Di—I—I——"

"Don't say it again," with a shudder.

"But I must, for I love you, dear, and nothing else in this whole wide world should have kept me from you. Oh, if you could guess what it has been to me to keep away, and pretend to be cold!"

"It *was* pretence, then?" slowly, but with one quick upward glance, for in the midst of her whirling thoughts her whole life seemed to depend on the truth of his answer.

"Before God, it was the hardest work to

carry it on," he said solemnly, "that I ever did. It was absurd to think that you could care for a big rough fellow like me, but I'd have done my best to make you. You'll forget me easily enough, but forgive me, Di, if you can."

"I forgive you now," as the colour flew to her pale cheeks, and her eyes met his, and held them. "Phil might have done just the same, if Dick had tried to kill him."

"God bless you for saying that," he said with all his heart. Then he drew a deep breath, and leant against the tree, feeling quite bewildered. How could an earthquake happen, and leave him unshaken? Yet there he was, still talking to Di Witherington after his story was told. It was wonderful, but he must not take advantage of her pity. He passed his hand over his forehead, and bit his moustache in confused indecision. She walked a little further on, and leant against the gate where Phil and Jack had stood earlier in the day. Resting her elbows on the top rail, she

tried to collect her thoughts, feeling inhuman and horrid, because, instead of being utterly engrossed with the tragedy of "The Miner's Rest," another thought would push to the front—the thought that Jack's coldness had been a pretence. She shook all over when he came close beside her, and waited breathlessly for him to speak, uncertain what she ought to say or do, but still resolved not to let him go, if she could be sure that he wished to stay. "I place myself in your hands," he began slowly, though his heart was thumping fast. "Tell me, am I to go or stay?"

"If you—you like Derwent's Cray," blushing vividly, "why, stay there, to be sure."

"If I stay, you know what that means?" trying to look into her face.

"That you don't want to go!" in a confused whisper.

"And, by George, I won't!" he exclaimed, with a wild thrill of delight, as he stooped and kissed her hands. And then, across the delirium of his joy, came one scruple after

another. Was he right to take advantage of a girl's weakness, a girl's tenderness? Wasn't it mean to 'rush' her without a moment for reflection, without the smallest leisure to consider what her father would say? How would she feel, if they all cried shame on her for linking herself to the man who had killed her brother? "I won't take your answer to-day," he said slowly, "but this day week, when you've had time to think."

"I don't want to think," she answered, with lashes glued to her cheeks and a tremble in her voice. "You are—*you*, whatever you've done." And then, aghast at her own boldness, she hid her face on the rail of the gate.

CHAPTER XVII.

PHIL.

THAT day week was Phil's birthday, which was always kept as a festival in the Witherington family ; but this year he announced that he did not want any fuss to be made about it. He only wished to go up the river, and lunch somewhere on the banks—just his father and mother, Di, Montague, Vivian, and, of course, the Kindersleys. Mrs. Witherington made a thousand difficulties, but Phil triumphed over them all, and proudly handed her into a good-sized boat, with a special cushion, an extra shawl, a bottle of salts, a book of meditations, and a camp-stool! At the last moment the Rector was called away, on account of the sudden illness of a parishioner,

which Phil pronounced to be "a beastly shame"; but he found consolation in the fact that Flo came without her father, and consented to accompany him in his favourite outrigger. Vivian and Montague took the oars in the larger boat, and, in spite of two distinct styles of rowing acquired at the rival universities, sent it along at a capital pace. To Cyril Vivian it was a most enjoyable holiday. After the disagreeable sights and smells of the slums, the stifling atmosphere of stuffy rooms, the constant vision of poverty wearing itself out in its hopeless struggle after the impossible "enough, it was delightful to get away into the fresh, sweet air, with the lap of the water against the sides of the boat, the resinous scent of the pines floating in the light breeze like a message from the woods, the long silences and the pleasant breaks of talk with people who did not seem to have many cares on their minds. He felt like a schoolboy out for his treat, and, like that same schoolboy, he banished his work from his tired brain, and

gave himself up completely to the enjoyment of the hour. There was something in his thoughtful face which kept Mrs. Witherington's fidgeting whims in check, and she did not worry her husband and daughter out of their wits, as Di had rather expected. Montague was quite content to watch Di's every movement, and to intercept a glance, every now and then, over Vivian's shoulder, from a pair of grey eyes that had grown as shy as a hare's. If she finally accepted him, he meant to go straight to the Colonel, and he was in a fever of impatience to get his opportunity that day. But luck was against him from first to last. Mrs. Witherington, directly after luncheon, which she enjoyed on her camp-stool, enchained him in a conversation about some *protégés* of hers in Derwent's Cray, whilst Di wandered away with Vivian and the Colonel to show them a spot which she meant to sketch. A new shyness was upon her, and she avoided Jack as if he had suddenly developed the plague. But he was not a man to be easily

baffled, and when he had made up his mind to do a certain thing, he had an awkward way of striding over all the obstacles which were placed in his path, without much regard for appearances. Most of the party were already seated in the boats, when Di discovered that she had dropped a gold bangle. Jack cunningly refrained from offering to look for it until she had started, and then he followed her with long, eager strides. The bracelet was lying at the foot of a stile, in a self-evident way, as if it had done it all on purpose for Montague's benefit. She stooped to pick it up, and as she raised her head, found herself face to face with Jack.

"We must hurry back," she said breathlessly, with a sudden accession of colour.

"Yes," standing straight before her, immovable as the Eddystone Lighthouse; "but you must give me my answer first. Do you love me enough to condone the rest?" very gravely, his face growing white to the lips.

Di felt her heart flutter as if it would choke

her ; even her knees began to shake like those of a rheumatic old man ; she looked to the thorn on the left, to the maple on the right, and then finding there was no escape, said desperately :

“ Yes ; I told you so before ! ” and then——

* * * * *

Some time later when the patience of those in the boats was quite exhausted, the Colonel came after the missing pair. “ Never mind that plaguey bracelet,” he called out irascibly, as soon as he saw the two figures advancing slowly towards him. “ I’d rather buy you a dozen than be kept dawdling about all day. ’Pon my soul, I think you might have hurried up a little faster,” he added in an aggrieved tone.

“ All right—here I am,” and Di ran down to the bank, and jumped into the boat, without waiting to defend herself.

Phil had shot far ahead, but having dawdled about looking for forget-me-nots, which had forgotten to come out, the others caught him

up at the gates of the lock ; and Jack, with a twinkle in his eye, thanked him politely for having waited for them.

“ Look here, old chap, I’ll pay you out, sure as a gun,” dragging a muddy weed up by the roots, and flinging it at the spotless purity of Jack’s flannels. It missed its mark, and alighted on Vivian’s neck, just on the nape, and startled him so much that the oar slipped from his grasp, and would have floated out of reach, if Jack had not made a frantic dash after it.

“ I say, you fellows, no sky-larking now,” commanded the Colonel, with military imperiousness. “ A lock’s not the safest place for playing the fool.”

But his son was perfectly irrepressible, and Flo did nothing but abet him in all his nonsense, for, as she said, she had been on the river ever since she was no height at all, and she was not going to begin to be afraid at her age. Jack was rather, as people

say, "off his head." His new happiness intoxicated him, and he felt he must either sit as silent as a Sphinx, and chew the cud of it in concentrated enjoyment, or else bubble over into all sorts of boyish follies; whilst Di, on the contrary, took her happiness more sedately, and ought to have attracted everybody's attention by the evident way in which she was trying to avoid it. Phil jumped out in the most unnecessary manner to perform the lock-keeper's office, and Jack scrambled up the bank to pick some long grass which Di had admired earlier in the day; but she sat as if lost in a dream. After the many weary months of doubt, disappointment, and unrest, peace had come to her hand in hand with joy, and she felt as if she could only keep quite quiet, whilst her overflowing heart sent up a song of thanksgiving to heaven for this great happiness. She was startled by a scream from Flo, and a great splash, which made the boat rock as if with a sudden earthquake. She looked up—Phil was gone!—Flo was

deathly white ; Jack stood for one instant on the bank, straight and tall ; then flung himself down without a moment's hesitation into the boiling waters.

“ Phil ! Phil ! my boy ; he'll be drowned ! ” Mrs. Witherington screamed again and again. Di put her hand on her shoulder. She saw the scared face of the lock-keeper, who shut down the trap. She knew the danger. Phil, her darling, her only brother, might be jammed the next moment in the manhole, and then, God help him ! It seemed an endless time before Jack reappeared, panting, but fighting hard against the rush of waters, which were sucking him down. He was dragging the boy to the surface, but Di's heart stood still with agonising fear, for Phil's fair head hung limply on his shoulder, and he was making no effort to save himself. The Colonel's and Vivian's eager hands were stretched out to help them, but it was a stranger who gave the most efficacious assistance, and pulled them both up on to the bank. “ Only just in

time," panted Jack, as he crawled on to the grass.

"Wal, I'm no denying it was a bit risky," rejoined a familiar voice, and to his amazement, he saw that the thin bearded face, which was peering into his with curious eyes, was that of Octavius Slocumbe. There was no time for anything but a grip of the hand, and then both turned to look after Phil. He was still lying on the grass, making no sign of life, whilst small rivulets ran from his hair and his clothes on to the parched earth all around him. "Give him air," said his father huskily, not having the least idea what ought to be done under the circumstances.

"He will be all right presently," said Vivian cheeringly, as he saw despair written plainly on the white faces of the two girls, the one who loved Phil, and the other whom Phil loved, as all the neighbourhood knew.

"With your leave, sir, I'll fix the young gentleman right away ;" and Slocumbe, pushing his way to the front, knelt down, and began

to use the usual scientific methods for bringing air back into the lungs. Jack helped him, and soon some sort of life returned into what had looked so like a dead body for those endless three minutes before, whilst the others held their breath as they watched.

“Now take that gate off its fixings, and we’ll carry the lad up to my bit of a place. The sooner we get him between the blankets, the better it will be for him.” Slocumbe gave his orders, and was obeyed at once. The Colonel seemed too stunned to ask any questions. Poor Mrs. Witherington had fainted away in the boat, and was being attended to by the lock-keeper’s wife. Flo, now that the tension of nerve and thought was over, was sobbing her heart out with her head hidden in Di’s lap. She had borne up bravely, and never lost her presence of mind, even when she saw that he, having forgotten to secure the key, the handle slipped off the windlass, and Phil fell headlong into the hissing waters, striking his head against the iron as

he went. She had not over-balanced the boat by a futile attempt to save him. She had not added to the confusion and terror by uttering scream after scream, as his poor terrified mother had done; but as she saw him fall with the unfinished laugh on his lips, saw the waters close over his yellow head, and clutch him in their fierce embrace, she realised that, with Phil gone, the world would seem very empty, and life would never be the same again.

And oh! how she thought of every time she had snubbed him out of caprice, or teased him out of perversity, till her poor little heart was torn with remorse, and she seemed to herself the cruellest, most detestable girl on earth. She looked up, her eyes still soaked with tears. "He ought to hate me!" she said, with a sob.

"You silly thing! He cares a hundred times more for you than for me, or any one else," throwing her arms round her with a passion of tenderness, because her brother

loved her. Di had been inclined to be jealous once of Flo, but now that she had the full quantum of Jack's love, she could spare her a bit of Phil's.

"I'll never, never be nasty to him again!" she asserted with all the more emphasis, because it had seemed so terribly possible, only a few minutes before, that she would never have an opportunity of being so again. And then she picked herself up, pushed back her tumbled hair, and went away quietly into the garden of the small white house, where Phil was still struggling between life and death, whilst Di stayed by her mother. When she had reached a spot where no one could see her, she knelt down on the unmown turf, and prayed with passionate desire that his young life might be spared; and as she rose from her knees, stilled and awed, Vivian came across the lawn with the good news that Phil had opened his eyes and spoken, and she felt as if her own life could scarcely be long enough to prove her gratitude to heaven.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GREATEST SCAMP THAT EVER STEPPED THIS EARTH.

LATE that evening Montague came into Colonel Witherington's study, followed by the Scout. Phil had been well enough to be brought home in the carriage, and was now fast asleep in his own bed, under the care of his mother and sister, who watched over him as people do over any jewel that they have nearly lost. Slocumbe turned up just at the right moment, for Jack had been worried by the consciousness that he had nothing but his own word to support his assertion that he had killed Moseley in self-defence. It was easy enough to convince a girl who was fond of him, for women are more often led by affection

than reason, but the Colonel would feel it his duty to ask for proof, and until Slocumbe's advent, proof he had none. The Scout would not allow that there was anything out of the natural course in his appearance on that particular spot, at that particular moment. He reminded Jack that he had told him at Stanfield's, that he had a bit of a place on the Derwent, and that he might be likely to come and have a look at it in the spring; and he expressed his utmost willingness to inform the Colonel how that mean skunk of a Moseley slithered from one world into another, after doing his level best to send Jack Montague on before him.

The Colonel gave them both a hearty welcome, and having provided them with chairs and cigars, waited with some curiosity to hear what Montague had to say in conjunction with that queer-looking American. He wondered if he had come in answer to a summons from Jack, for it seemed too much to believe that his appearance was unpremeditated.

Jack leant his arm on the writing-table, and bent forward.

"I have asked your daughter to be my wife," he said abruptly, with no outward sign of the turmoil in his mind, "and I want to know, before going any further, if you have any objection to me as your son-in-law?"

"God bless my soul!" the Colonel exclaimed in intense surprise, looking from one to the other, from Jack's eager face and earnest eyes, to the American's stolid countenance, which seemed to say in plain English, "I've no concern in this matter." "I never was so taken aback in my life. Hadn't we better talk it over when we are alone?" with another glance at the Scout.

"Only just tell me, if you have any objection to me, or my position, or my fortune," Jack persisted.

Colonel Witherington hesitated, for it flashed across him that there *was* something queer about the fellow. He never went inside a

church, for one thing, and he had behaved very oddly to them all that winter; on the other hand, he had saved his son's life that very afternoon.

"I like you uncommonly, you know that, Jack, and nothing would please me more, if I'm to lose my little girl, than to have her close at my elbow at The Priory. But"—he stopped in some embarrassment, and Slocumbe with ready tact walked off to the window, where he stood with his hands in his pocket, whistling in a whisper.

"Ah, there is a but," Jack drew a deep breath. "You've noticed that there was something wrong with me; it has kept me from church for four years, but it won't do so again, and it has made me the most miserable dog alive."

"Before I can give my child to you, you must tell me what it is," the Colonel said very gravely.

"I've come for that purpose." He braced himself as if for a great effort, and then went

on steadily: "And I've brought Slocumbe with me, that you may be quite sure that I've not made out too good a case for myself."

"I would have taken your word for it, Jack."

"Yes, I know you would, but it's more satisfactory to have a witness," throwing back his head proudly. "To make a long story short, when I was in America four years ago, I came across Dick Moseley, whom I knew up at Trinity. Talking over old times brought us closer together, and we got quite friendly."

"You must have been hard up for a friend."

"Yes," looking at the Colonel in grave surprise, for the remark was not one that he would have expected to be made on a dead son. "I was a fool; but I thought it was pleasant to have somebody to remind me of my undergraduate days, and we started together for the Rockies. On the way we dawdled

first at one place, then another—he was dead on gambling, and I couldn't get him on."

"I'd bet his play wasn't always on the square."

"You're right, Colonel," put in Slocumbe, coming forward, and sitting down on a chair the reverse way, with his bearded face over the mahogany back. "It was never on the square to my thinking, and I looked after him as sharp as a cow-scraper, so I ought to know. He kinder glued himself on to Montague, and fleeced him all he knew, and brought a couple of pards with him to finish off the job. Montague wasn't in that line, so he didn't take kindly to the business, and he flared up at Moseley one afternoon, and told him to shunt, and never come within miles of him again. With that, my fine swaggering bully pulls out his Derringer, flies into a devil of a rage, and fires at Montague's head. He would have been dead as the wapiti

he shot the week before, if I hadn't moved up Moseley's shooter at the moment he fired."

"Yes, Slocumbe saved my life that day."

"As you did Phil's this very afternoon," put in the Colonel, with a sudden softening of his eyes.

"That was nothing. But to go on, Moseley sprang on me like a tiger, and I—I was so mad with passion, that I caught him up, and flung him outside the door."

"And serve him right too!"

"Stop—you haven't heard all," lowering his voice. "He lost his balance, and fell over the edge of the rock, and when I went to look for him, he was dead—and I had killed him!"

"And saving your pardon, Colonel, though this Moseley seems to have been your son, the world can worry on pretty well without him," said Slocumbe briskly.

"No son of mine, thank heaven!" cried the

Colonel, getting up from his chair with a sense of relief.

"*Not your son !*" said Jack, slowly, as if he could not believe his ears.

"No, I don't see why you should father me on to the greatest scamp that ever stepped this earth."

Jack stood up, his eyes dilating, his broad chest heaving. "Mrs. Witherington said he was her son, her eldest son."

The Colonel shrugged his shoulders. "That is a crank of my wife's. 'Pon my word, I believe she took to him because no one else could bear the sight of him. My wife was a widow when I married her. Her former husband was Arthur Moseley, whose former wife was Jane Symonds, and Dick was their son—stepson to Mrs. Witherington, but no relation, thank God, either of mine or of my children's."

Jack slipped back into his chair, and the room seemed to turn round, with all its

chairs and tables. The man whom he had killed was *not* Di's brother, he could think of nothing else. The news, in spite of the immense relief it brought, seemed to have stunned him.

"Wal, Colonel, having fixed it in your mind that this affair of Moseley's was only a matter of self-defence, and not even seventh cousin to a murder"—the Colonel nodded in grave assent—"I'll just step out, with your leave, and take a look round to see how they rig up a first-rate holding in the old country." Disclaiming all wish to be accompanied, Slocumbe opened the French window, closed it behind him, and disappeared, on purpose to leave the two men together.

Colonel Witherington came up to Montague, and laid his hand on his shoulder. "Is this what has been clouding your life?"

"Yes, it has made me feel like a hypocrite and an outcast."

"Poor fellow, I daresay I should have done the same thing myself. Dick Moseley

would have got a rise out of an angel from Heaven."

Jack started up. "And you will give me your daughter in spite of it?"

"Rather to you than to any other man I know."

He seized the Colonel's hand in a convulsive grip. "How can I ever thank you?"

"How can I thank *you* for saving my boy to-day? I think we are almost quits."

And then, gruffly, with the tears in his eyes, but with a smile, he added, "Come into the drawing-room, and I'll fetch Di," for he saw that Jack was on the point of breaking down, and he had an Englishman's horror of any display of emotion.

Montague, on his side, began to fear that Colonel Witherington had not understood the whole drift of his self-accusation, and suspected that he had won his forgiveness under false pretences, which disturbed his honest nature. He stopped him just as he had reached the door. "One moment," he said hurriedly.

“Did you understand that without my fiend of a temper, I might have saved myself without doing for poor Moseley?”

“Yes, I think so,” leaning against the wall, and looking up into the earnest face above him with grave eyes. “You were provoked beyond measure; and after such a lesson as that, I should think you had got it completely under control, or else you wouldn’t be half a man.”

“I’ve tried my best,” said Jack simply; “but there’s another thing, I was fearfully wild out there, so utterly wild that I’m ashamed to think of it now.”

“For those few weeks with Moseley—not afterwards?” with keen eyes looking him through and through.

“Not afterwards. I loathe to remember it,” with a frown of disgust, “I give you my word.”

“Then, perhaps, you are in a safer position than others who have never tried it, my dear boy,” smiling kindly; “most of us have

been a bit wild in our youth. You've been through a bitter training, and have come off with some scars, perhaps, but you are perfectly healed. I think that's enough for us. Come along." He opened the door, and Jack followed him down the passage, feeling as if he were treading on air. At the foot of the broad staircase, he stopped and looked up. The next moment, he dashed up the stairs three steps at a time, and the Colonel, having caught sight of a fluttering white skirt, discreetly walked back into the study. How many years it was since he had given his Marian his first kiss, and how odd it seemed now to have made such a fuss about it! The difference between the rapturous "then," and the unemotional "now," made him feel as if he might be getting old.

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Lady Wildgrave rejoiced heartily over Jack's happiness, and promised him the nicest wedding present she could think of. As the long year passed slowly away, her thoughts were often

resting sadly on Dandy. He had been so good to her during the whole time of her married life, and though she knew that his devotion had given some ground for ill-natured people to talk, she had always felt that there could be no harm in it, if it was kept within proper bounds. Now that she had time to reflect from morning till night, instead of constant hurrying from one engagement to another, she began to see, however, that there *was* harm in anything that looked like evil, although based on secret innocence. A true woman cannot afford to lose the respect of the world, and as Dandy formed a large part of the world to the lonely little widow, it gave her a terrible pang to think that she had probably forfeited his respect, if not his love, by sliding into that constant quasi-flirtation with him. He was a long while in Canada; and as soon as he came back, he started off on another diplomatic mission to Constantinople, but if Em had only known it, he was keeping out of England simply because if he had been

within a hundred miles of her he could *not* have kept away from her. She was the centre of his thoughts wherever he went, and he had the firmest intention of hurrying back to claim her as soon as the year of mourning was over. Perhaps she might not marry him till two years had passed, but at least he would put in his claim before any other fellow could interfere ; and, in course of time, they would show to an admiring world what a model husband and wife they could make. Having studied the game of matrimony very closely, he felt as if he were up in all the moves, and knew exactly which were marked dangerous, and which were safe and profitable. Having been a thorn in the side of many husbands, and enjoyed himself thoroughly in that position, he meant to put his foot down from the first, and forbid any fellow under sixty from dangling at his wife's heels : resolution that his friends say he is certain to keep, for an ex-thief makes a capital detective. But in truth Lord Raymond's mind had taken a more serious turn. He had not

been so much at Derwent's Cray and Dainton without being struck by the earnest motive given to life in both places; and looking back at his own butterfly existence, he had realised for the first time its cruelty. If Em had not possessed the strength of innate rectitude, she might have yielded something warmer than friendship in answer to his assiduous attentions, in which case he would have added to her temptations instead of shielding her from them, as was his duty as his cousin's best friend. He had never gone so far as to cause a woman's name to be dragged through the dirt of a divorce court; but he was ashamed to think how often he had, just for the sake of amusement, ruined the domestic peace of a household. What was play to him, meant danger for a wife, and torture for her husband. Like the bad boy in a moral tale, he resolved never to do it again.

Mr. Strangways took back the three hundred as he had promised; but when he

heard that Miss Witherington, of The Wilderness, was engaged to Mr. Montague, of The Priory, he declared that he had been swindled into performing an absurdly quixotic action, and robbed of the only reward he cared for. Harding was dismissed by a higher power than the owner of the factory, for he sank under a sharp attack of typhoid fever, brought on, as Dr. Prescott observed, by the foetid atmosphere of the ill-ventilated dens in which he forced his hands to work. Grey Towers was let for a long term, whilst Mr. Strangways went abroad to inspect foreign factories. The wrongs of his own workmen having excited public attention, are sure to be righted before long, for the eye of the County Council is upon their master, and the man who does not quail before it must have the spirit of "the dauntless fly."

Aurelia Blake left that celebrated ball at Grey Towers before the disturbance began, so that she had no opportunity of figuring as a heroine before Vivian's eyes; but she has

lately turned over a brand new leaf, and astonished the world by appearing as the ardent champion of Voluntary Schools, and the eloquent denouncer of School Boards.

As we close these pages there is danger in the air, for the battle is raging, and the champions of Christianity are bound to show their colours. As one untruth is always the precursor of another, so one compromise ever requires a second to cover it. The Board school system is producing its natural effect, and free education is only a further betrayal of principle. The voluntary schools in large towns, especially those of the North, cannot stand against it; and consequently they will be brought under a Board, which will be another blow struck at the Church as our educator. Some may say it is too late to cry out, others that it is fortunate that the Bill comes to us from our friends, and not from our open foes; but it would be just as sensible to assert that it is better to be wounded by a friend than an enemy. On the other hand, it is never too

late to mend. If we held our tongues in the past, that is no reason why we should be silent in the present crisis. Let every Christian, to whatever sect he may belong, lay this truth to his heart, that the Church of God can never make the smallest Compromise with secularity in any form whatever.

THE END.



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